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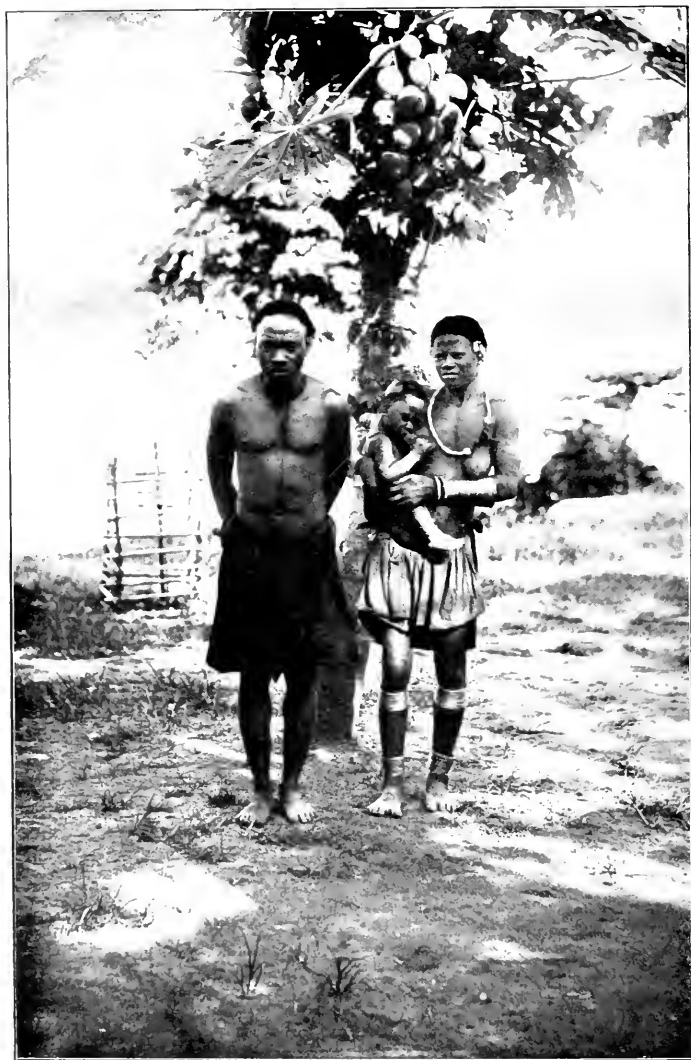




SAVAGE MAN IN CENTRAL AFRICA







*Plate I.* KAKA CHIEF WITH HIS WIFE AND CHILD.

Frontispiece.

# SAVAGE MAN IN CENTRAL AFRICA

A STUDY OF PRIMITIVE RACES  
IN THE FRENCH CONGO

*By* ADOLPHE LOUIS CUREAU  
GOUVERNEUR HONORAIRE DES COLONIES

TRANSLATED BY E. ANDREWS

T. FISHER UNWIN  
LONDON: ADELPHI TERRACE

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## INTRODUCTION

“They are savages, in the same way that we say fruits are wild, which Nature produces of herself, and by her own ordinary progress.”  
—*Montaigne's Essays*, Bk. I. ch. xxx, *trans.* Hazlitt.

THE last savage races are disappearing from the world's stage. The few survivors of primitive mankind behold the deterioration of their pristine customs, the vitiation of their artlessly unmoral natures, and the crumbling of their social order's ancient foundations under the rising tide of the European invasion, one-tenth of which is actuated by an enthusiastic desire to spread the blessings of civilization, nine-tenths by the attractions of money-making. Conquest is breaking the normal sequence of their history by an abrupt scission, down the gulf of which their past will soon disappear in the shades of oblivion. No time is to be lost if we would record what were the external and obvious forms of this past, and, more especially, its profound and psychological causes ; for the centuries to come will be increasingly less qualified to understand the nature of primitive man.

Many people feel naught but contempt for these barbarians, these backward brothers, outcasts of humanity, whose darkened intellect, incapable of complete development, repels sympathy, whose bestial habits excite disgust, and whose stupidity discourages any attempt at education. But those who knew them well in their native simplicity appreciated them—I had almost said “valued” them—precisely because their barbarism was so ingenuous and their naturalism so

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frank. They were worthy of curiosity and interest because they were virgin natures, the modern witnesses of primitive humanity, such as it existed shortly (I mean some hundreds of thousands of years) after it had extricated itself from the swaddlings of pure animality. For more than twenty years I studied their every phase in all the districts of that vast territory which comprises the French Congo. I examined them at every stage of their progress, from the child of Nature, pure and simple, to the citizen of their small kingdoms, and saw them sketching the outline of early society as though in a series of tableaux. I spoke their dialects, I lived their life, and was accordingly able to train myself to think their thoughts, as far as could be done by a mind so very different from their own.

Thus I may attempt to trace the origin of their social structure, such as they seem to me to have conceived it, in a spontaneous and unassuming work, which is not at all in the nature of a new account added to the many others given by distinguished explorers, whose narratives are unquestionably honest, but are composed of notes gathered by the way, of particulars relating to special localities, and of anecdotes which are more quaint than instructive.

How far has the labour which I am undertaking any prospect of success in portraying the general history of mankind at the dawn of civilization? Certainly we cannot admit that the modern Negro and primitive man are absolutely identical ; for this is negatived by several potent considerations, chief among which are the important differences that exist in racial mentality and in climate. But at the outset we may answer this objection by assuming that primitive man could not have been extremely dissimilar in different places, and that between various specimens of man in a state of Nature, it would seem there must be a resemblance of habits, appetites, and passions. As the disinterment of

prehistoric remains bears witness, the first men who wandered over the earth's surface differed from one another only in that secret spark which was buried in the recesses of their souls, and which in one instance was destined to become a conflagration, in another to smoulder indefinitely beneath the ashes. During an enormous number of centuries their progress must have described the same curve, because it was a function of mentalities which were almost identical. Deviations made their appearance only at the end of a very long period of time ; but from the moment when they did so, they continued to manifest themselves incessantly.

Climates unquestionably cast men in different moulds. But, taking account of all dissimilarities, it is none the less true that wild Nature was everywhere harsh and formidable to savage man. In the Magdalenian epoch our pleasant France, covered with dense forests and swamps, and overrun with wild beasts, was no whit less harsh and inhospitable than is modern Central Africa.

Hence, if one cannot in all strictness assume the precise similarity of the different races of mankind upon the entire earth's surface, at least it does not seem unreasonable to conceive of a certain resemblance between them ; and, moreover, in order that due allowance may be made for the conditions peculiar to the small portion of mankind which I am studying, I shall risk being tiresome, and shall constantly recall to the reader the scenery of the stage upon which the piece is played.

The general survey which I intend will expose me to cavilling remarks from those who are experts on African questions, but whom their occupations or the accidents of their exotic lives have confined to one nook and one tribe of this part of the Old World. They will perhaps find discrepancies of detail between their specialized observations and my synthetic descriptions. I beg them earnestly not to forget that I am proceeding like a landscape painter : I deal with large masses

only ; I employ broad colouring ; I get my perspective by that shutting of one eye which does away with negligible incongruities and lets naught remain save a clearer, distincter, more harmonious whole.

On principle I shall avoid detail of anecdote which is merely picturesque. I shall strive to construct the embryology of these states of society ; to analyse their birth, their development and their progress ; if possible to isolate in the social body the genesis of authority, which is the primordial principle of human associations. The embryo must consequently be dissected ; but at the same time I would fain avoid a danger which seems to me very serious. The abuse of analysis, dissection, dissociation, and laboratory study insensibly leads to an abnormal conception of beings and phenomena. Nature is like a block which may not be touched without being deformed at the same blow. And, if we must divide her into fragments, in order to bring her parts within the compass of our understanding, still we must occasionally take time to fall back and examine her in such a way as to replace the parts removed and give to her entire self its true form and proportions. A dried specimen in an herbarium is not a plant ; an anatomical member preserved in spirit is not an animal. Hence I shall constantly endeavour to refer each part to the whole, hoping that the reader may be of my opinion that repetition is not a literary fault, provided it is systematic and intended. It is arbitrary to think that there is no science save that of numbers, or the measurement of time, length, or weight. The analytical study of colour, of an impression received, of the instinctive feeling of attraction or repulsion, the moral influence of what has been called the soul of inanimate objects : all this is scientific too, for it all exerts a paramount influence upon the development of man's thought.

As far as it is humanly possible, I shall above all things refrain from preconceived ideas, from a ready-



made plan, and from even the best-established theories. I do not wish to know the theorems and classifications of classical sociology. If I borrow a convenient term from philosophy or science, that I may better express my thought, I shall wish to use the broadest eclecticism. I shall surrender myself to the facts, and let them prompt me as to their logical sequence. I shall explain a phenomenon by its apparently most proximate causes, and by the most obvious natural laws, not by deductions, which are entirely too conjectural, from a science of which our primitive tribes are but the first chapter. I shall be an impartial, unknown, invisible spectator of this history, which is both ancient and modern, keeping myself unmoved in the midst of the motion which surrounds me, so that I may not confuse the rate or direction of its progress.

As we proceed, I shall encounter matters which are familiar, but which must be repeated in order not to leave any gaps in the subject. Barbaric justice, and the origin of commerce, exchange and money, have no longer any secrets from any one, and of course I shall not accentuate them; for in this study the movement seems to me less interesting than the clock, the straw than the sheaf.

I should not have been honest, and should indeed have exposed myself to gross errors, had I confined myself to my own observations and impressions. A check was necessary, and this I sought in the experiences of a certain number of functionaries, officers, missionaries, and merchants, who did not flinch from the tiresome task of answering the lists of questions which I addressed to them.<sup>1</sup> I was thus enabled to

<sup>1</sup> Among my amiable collaborators I wish particularly to thank M. Bruel, the Chief Administrator, the Administrators MM. de Mostuéjous, Jamet and de Kerkaosel, and Fathers Martrou and Doppler, of the Mission of the Holy Ghost, as their discreet and exhaustive communications have been of great service to me in clearing up obscure points and in affording me a check upon my own explanations.

confirm or disprove my own ideas by comparison with those from outside. To this criticism I have brought the most straightforward independence of mind, guarding against personal bias, and eliminating—at least, I sincerely believe so—every sort of preconceived idea.

I have consulted few books, because, in arriving at the sort of average which this work sets forth, I wished to be able to take into account what in applied mathematics is called the weight of each of my sources of information. I had access to this factor in the cases of my different correspondents ; but it remained indeterminate in authors who were personally unknown to me.

The plan which we are to pursue is very simple, and naturally comprises three great divisions : the geographical and human environment in which are unfolded the social phenomena that I shall have to describe ; the psychological individual as an element of social life ; and, finally, social life itself, which is the principal subject of the present study. The plan which I shall pursue in this latter sociological portion consists of a survey, in the order of their complexity, of the successive stages of Negro social life, from the bi-sexual couple to the highest social organizations which we have been enabled to observe in Tropical Africa. Some of the latter have been subjected to a very evident foreign influence, so that they are no longer the spontaneous products which alone interest us, and I shall accordingly leave them on one side.

In order to render my account clearer and more orderly, it will suffice me to enumerate and briefly define the intermediate conditions of our primitive Africans as they progress socially. I shall, however, give special prominence to the commonest and most characteristic organisms, and these stopping-places in the narrative will illustrate and define the unemphasized terms of the series.

BOOK I

THE CONGO RACES  
AND THEIR  
ENVIRONMENT



IT is not, of course, my intention to write a treatise on geography and ethnography in this place ; for I should risk being at once too brief and too lengthy, which in the former case would endanger my falling into obscurity and serious omissions, and in the latter might cause me to exceed the limits of my present subject. My simple desire is to construct a brief prologue, which, at a glance, shall bring before the reader—I had almost said “the spectator”—both scene and actors. The only pictures which concern us, and which may fittingly serve as an introduction to the main part of this study, are the great orographic and hydrographic features of Tropical Africa, the physical aspect of the country, and the physiognomy and general bearing of the multitudes which move upon this vast stage.

## 1. THE ENVIRONMENT.

In its main features the orographic structure of the African continent is now well known. Mountainous massifs are rare, occurring in scattered islets, but not in the form of long, continuous, or branching chains, as in Europe and Asia.

Africa consists of vast plateaux superimposed one upon the other, each plateau being hollowed into a shallow basin with a slender ledge at its periphery. The way from each plateau to the one immediately beneath it leads rather abruptly down an exceedingly steep declivity. As one proceeds inland from the ocean, it is like a gigantic staircase, each step of

which is from six hundred to nine hundred feet higher than the one below it, and from hundreds to thousands of miles broad. The first step is under water, and runs parallel to the coast. The second forms that spur which, in the respective regions, is designated by the successive names of the Crystal Mountains, Mayombe, Palabala, etc.

It is this orographic peculiarity which has so long delayed the exploration of the African continent, and which renders travel therein so difficult and sometimes so dangerous.

Now let us suppose for a moment that ages ago the superficial conformation of the land in Africa all at once became exactly such as I have just described it. We may observe in addition that the rock, which is everywhere very near the surface, makes the soil comparatively impermeable. At any epoch we please, but at a very remote one, now let us precipitate torrents of seasonal rain-water from a cloud-laden sky. This rain-water accumulates in the superficial concavities of the successive plateaux, where it is collected into an equal number of lakes or inland seas. When each basin is full the water seeks a point on the peripheral ledge where the slope is steepest and where there is the least resistance, and hurls itself downward in the form of torrents, rapids, or cataracts.

In like manner the same series of phenomena is repeated from plateau to plateau ; but in the course of time the weir thus formed is scooped out ; the friable soil is carried away, and the hardest rocks are disintegrated by the violence of the current and by striking against one another. In proportion as the barrier weakens, the level of the water up-stream sinks and the lake above slowly empties, permitting the gradual emergence of its bottom, covered with ooze, bog, and alluvial deposits of every kind.

In the end the diminished volume of water occupies a very circumscribed area at the bottom of the

depression, while that which escapes from the weir and descends from the higher level must cut a meandering, tortuous, and changeable channel for itself in the slimy and almost level surface over which it spreads.

Three important consequences result from this formation.

The first is that, because great elevations are wanting, there are no glaciers and no springs to speak of. The rivulets which are the sources of the great rivers arise from the overflow and diffusion of the rain-water upon the impermeable surface of the plateaux.

The second consequence follows from the first, which indeed implies the absence of a regulator in the hydrographic system. Since the origin and rate of progress of the watercourses depend in the closest and most direct way upon the rainfall, and since the condensation of the atmospheric vapours is periodical—diluvial during six months, and almost nothing at all during the remaining half-year—there follow alternations of floods and low-water stages which are periodical, like their exciting cause. When the basin is very extensive—like the Congo Basin—the rainy season, which varies according to latitude, prevails over but one zone at a time ; so that the annual rise of the main watercourse is closely connected with the size of the tributaries which feed it.

The third consequence is the following : the rocky sluices which confine the higher waters within the ledges of the plateaux gradually weaken as time goes on, and the general low-water mark sinks in proportion. Now, in consequence of the almost horizontal character of the ground, a slight variation in the level is sufficient to denude considerable stretches of country, and the final conclusion is that the uplands are drained slowly and irretrievably. The soil is swept away by the rains ; vegetation becomes blanched and stunted, and the climate itself suffers the consequences ; for when it is deprived of its vaporous screen it becomes extremely

hot and dry. Thus the progressive changes in the appearance of the districts which succeed one another from the fluvial region of the south to the borders of Wadai and Darfur exemplify the phases through which the vast, barren stretches of North Africa must have passed : first, the tall, luxuriant forest, and then, in chronological order, copse, thicket, steppe, and sand. The traveller who makes his way from the Congo Basin toward the Sudan has a very clear impression of this gradual evolution, and we find other evidences of the same thing on the Bateke plateau.

Let us now attempt to show in what way this geographical structure affects man's habitat, and for this purpose let us follow the highroad of African explorers, which leads from the coast to the interior.

In the littoral region between the sea and the spur which constitutes the first plateau, the rivers disperse in branches and many canals, lose their way in wide-spreading sheets of water and in lakes, and slowly deposit the elements of lands to come on the pestilent dungheap of the rich paludal flora. As one leaves the sea, one traverses the successive stages of this geological activity. At first one encounters a product of brackish water, in the form of a soft ooze, which is alternately submerged and laid bare by the tide twice a day. This is the domain of the most diverse varieties of mangrove, lorded over by the magnificent rhizophora, that strange tree whose enormous roots support a straight, smooth trunk upon pointed arches twelve or fifteen feet in breadth, and whose seeds germinate on the branches and send their slender shoots, destined to reproduce the parent plant, from a height of sixty feet down towards the ooze. The whole is an inextricable tangle of branches, large and small ; of ramifying roots, of new growth ascending and of offshoots descending ; while the entire structure impends over bogs of evil-smelling mud, which exhale unwholesome



effluvia, and in which schools of small amphibious fish disport themselves.

Higher up appears the pandanus, with its dentelated leaves and its preference for water that is less salty. Then comes the river of fresh water, spreading out in immense sheets which are almost stagnant. Simultaneously there appear banks of grasses and papyrus, whose interlaced roots seem tightly packed together, and form vast floating fields. Then clay banks emerge, and clumps of new kinds of trees, to which the lianas cling by their long and formidable hooked ends. Finally the solid soil makes its appearance. Little rounded hillocks take shape, then hills, and then small mountains, which are indentations of the neighbouring plateau spared by erosion. At the same time the river contracts, growing wilder and more turbulent, and we now reach the edge of the first rapids.

Beyond this point for hundreds of miles on the under side of the plateau all is chaos and a confusion of rocks, trees, and raging waters. The maddened river is in a tumult. There are rumblings, giddy whirlpools, and prodigious jets of water spurt high into the air; there are formidable slips of the whole river and alternate expansions and contractions of its mass, like palpitations, or like the panting of a wrestler who is incensed at some obstacle.

Up above, on the plateau, the river spreads out in grandeur and majesty.

African watercourses are destitute of poetry and charm; they are niggardly of those delightful sites and bits of scenery which the streams of older Europe have borrowed from human art and industry. Nature, left to herself, is grave and austere. The African rivers, untouched by civilization, have the stern and heavy wildness of a scene set by capricious and untamed chance. The largest ones overwhelm the imagination by the extent of their volume, by the violence of their current, and by the frightful kinetic

energy of their mass. These giants know no moderation ; at one time they are quietude and apathy itself ; then suddenly they hurl themselves madly into the abyss in the midst of the desolation and ruin which they themselves have precipitated upon their path.

During the day, beneath the killing noontide sun, their surface is like a torpid bath of mercury, without a quiver, without a ripple, reflecting the pitiless glare of the glittering sky as in a mirror. We ask ourselves if we are living in the present time. Have we not all at once stepped back to those far-away ages when the earth, less cold, knew as yet only the rough outlines of life? The whole spectacle evokes the idea of a vanished world ; the glowing air oppresses one's breathing, a damp reek detaches itself from the tepid stream and floats over its surface as though over a boiling vat, luminous vapours unravel their tangled skein in the sky, the swampy banks exhale a fetid stench, from islands covered with slimy water there emerges an unexpected collection of tangled vegetation ; hippopotami sniff, as they blow jets of water into the air, a crocodile wallows open-mouthed in filthy sleep at the edge of a sandbank, a pelican advances with mincing step in search of fish, an anhinga—half bird, half snake—cleaves the air like an arrow, a varan extends itself on a big branch, quite ready to plunge back into its native element ; last of all come a herd of elephants, crossing a flooded glade, swinging their trunks and waving their great fan-like ears. The play of light contributes to the illusion. In the foreground there is a violent contrast of light and shade, while the background quivers in the superheated atmosphere and takes on vague contours. A mirage suspends islands and floating objects in the air, and divides them from their images reflected in the surface of the river. Blinding shafts of light cross and break in space, radiated back a millionfold by the sky, the polished leaves of the trees, the glistening waters, and the sand-





*Plate II.*

THE SANGA AT WESSO.

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banks. It seems as though one were set in the middle of a sphere reflecting light from innumerable facets. It is a sickening orgy of light, without graduation, colouring, or shading. There is no impression of delicacy and softness, no repose for the dazzled eye—naught but violence and crudity. In the end this brutal antithesis between the flashing light and the sombre foliage with its dark underbrush gives one a painful sense of discomfort, a strange sensation of sadness and affliction. One invokes the all-too-short moments after sundown as a relief, almost a consolation. The dread orb is then revealed only by a diffused blush confined to the regions of the west ; but its last expiring gleams cover the landscape with reflections which form the most unexpected combinations with the green of the foliage. In the space of a few moments one observes the unfolding of a chromatic scale of colours which a constant movement alternately unites and separates : gold, vivid rose, flesh-colour, mauve, lilac, deeper and deeper shades of violet, and finally indigo, and a dark blue which is soon lost in the shadows of the night. During this half-hour one sees blue struggle with red and finally vanquish it. Suddenly high up in the darkened sky, like a burst of jeering laughter, resound the discordant shrieks of a flock of parrots returning to their nests, and performing an incoherent concert of whistling, screaming, and croaking, as though these aerial monkeys would fain launch a clownish defiance at Nature's majestic gravity. Then this grotesque echo dies away in the distance, and night, with hawk-like swiftness, covers the whole surface of the sky.

Upon these vast depressions the river does not stop at its visible extent. The islands in it increase, and it divides into an infinite network of canals and intercommunicating creeks, becoming a vast inland delta, an unwholesome sewer full of alluvial matter which it has borrowed from the high plateaux of the interior.

If we now go one or two hundred miles aside from

the main thalweg, we shall find the soil inundated here too, some of it the whole year, some only at the time of floods. The ground is simply a vast stretch of swamp, from which the water cannot recede because of its flatness, its forests whose undergrowth is interspersed with sloughs of mud, and its floating fields of grasses and papyrus. No wonder that under such conditions this immense territory is the paradise of mosquitoes, and that very little solid, habitable earth is left for man. The villages are built upon the few clay banks which even floods do not submerge, and which measure only a few hundred feet in all directions. In certain districts, for instance in the Likuala-Mosaka Basin, the dwellings are built, either alone or in small groups, upon natural or artificial knolls, which barely escape the high-water mark, and communication between huts is by canoe.

Still farther on, we finally reach ground which is never submerged, even by the deepest floods. These are comparatively hospitable regions, which at all events are suitable for human habitation.

Such is the dwelling: now let us glance at the dwellers.

## 2. THE RACES.

The ethnography of our subject appears to be all disorder and confusion. The races, nations, tribes, and families which share the soil of the Dark Continent are innumerable. There is nothing to aid us in untangling the skein, for we find here neither monuments nor traditions, and the science of anthropology—which has never, as a matter of fact, been made the object of serious and generalized investigation—is swamped in an ocean of types which differ from one another by imperceptible gradings, from the individual to the entire black race. Nevertheless, in the portion of Africa with which I am acquainted, three great divisions distinctly command one's attention.

The first group, which is now reduced to a few wan-



*Plate III.*

THE CONGO AT THE CONFLUENCE OF THE JUÉ.

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dering families, probably represents the last remnants of the autochthonous race. These are the Negritos, among whom the purest specimens are conspicuous for their prognathism—the projection of the upper jaw and the suppression of the chin ; for their low stature, the comparative length of their upper limbs, their pale brown colour, the light pile covering the entire body, and, lastly, for their backward intellectual development and their timorous and shy disposition.<sup>1</sup> Pure types are now very rare. The characteristics which I have just described can be determined only by comparing the anatomical peculiarities observed in individuals who have been changed by cross-breeding and by the new conditions of life created for them by the invasion of superior races—perhaps I should say “less inferior” —of whom I shall have to speak in a moment. It is not certain that they have a language of their own at the present time. Their dialect appears to be either a half-obliterated remnant of a prehistoric Bantu language, or a clumsy imitation of modern Bantu tongues. It is a question whether this widely spread Negrito race has even a name of its own. Among at least twenty-five appellations given these people in different parts of Tropical Africa, we do not know at all which is the one they use themselves.

However this may be, these Akoa, Beku, Akkas, Tikitikis, Babinga, or in short, these Pygmies, who inhabit the wild and gloomy forest lands, appear to be the real aborigines of the Dark Continent.

On top of this first ethnic stratum there slowly spread a stream of invaders, who proceeded from the East Coast towards the west, along the great path made by the course of the Congo and its affluents. This is

<sup>1</sup> Harry H. Johnston, “Les Pygmées de l'Ouganda,” in *Revue Scientifique*, 1901 ; G. Bruel, “Notes ethnographiques sur quelques tribus de l'Afrique Équatoriale française,” in *Revue d'Ethnographie et de Sociologie*, 1910.

the population which now inhabits the Equatorial Region, from one side of Africa to the other. We do not know where its original home was, and perhaps it never will be known. Have we any valid ground for believing in the unity of these races? To tell the truth, we have none which is altogether convincing, for in spite of physical and linguistic analogies, their differences of detail are so numerous and often so glaring that it seems impossible to distinguish any bond of relationship between them. Can we ascribe to the same stock the brachycephalous Fan and the dolichocephalous Bakongo, or the little Bateke of the Upper Alima and the tall Babangi? Consider the thick-set, brawny Bakamba, and then the Basundi, with their delicate, intelligent features, prominent foreheads, and limbs which are vigorous in spite of their slenderness. Look at the active Balali, tiny creatures, whose forms are almost feminine, and compare them with the tall Atyo, with their loose-jointed, listless gait. How they all differ from the Bafuru, who are fine, strapping men, with prominent chests, broad, low foreheads and convex parietals, and still more from the tribes of the Central Ubangi, with their broad, athletic shoulders and narrow skulls—the incarnation of brute force !

What anthropometry's future verdict on this interesting question is to be I cannot imagine. In any case it must make haste, for the problem is becoming more complicated from day to day. Nevertheless, when one has lived long among these tribes, it would seem unreasonable not to feel that they are cousins, for they have features in common which are conspicuous among their dissimilarities. Such are their prominent cheek-bones, convex parietals, flat noses and gaping nostrils, thick lips, broad faces, prominent frontal bones, and very markedly square shoulders, comparatively long trunk, delicate extremities, and finally the brown colour of their skins, which reminds one of a cake of chocolate, but is never absolutely black. The differences between

the particular types of the various tribes and the general type are explicable by the prolonged influence of environment upon a series of generations, as, for instance, when one tribe has been quartered in a marsh, another on the plain, one in the gloomy forest and another on a sunny plateau.

We are thus enabled to picture to ourselves the formation of this ethnic rainbow, which extends from one coast of Africa to the other. If we compare distant tribes the differences are obvious. But between such extremes we find a continuous series of small groups of all possible differences of shading, which are hardly to be distinguished, just as in the solar spectrum one can scarcely indicate the exact line of demarcation between yellow and green.

The same gradual variation is noticeable in their dialects, where, too, the differences which belong to each tribe are dominated by general principles and a common spirit. We note—

1. The formation of the plural by means of a prefix placed in front of the word, or substituted for the prefix which indicates the singular.

2. The “concord” of adjectives, pronouns, etc., with their substantive is always effected by beginning the words according to a rule of euphony which tends to give all the limiting words the same initial consonance as the word limited. Thus we say in Congo :—

o	mamagne	mampembe	mabote
	white	stones	[are] beautiful.

3. The use of a little word which European grammarians call the relative, whose object is to establish relationship, possession, or attribution, and which enters as such into the composition of adjectives and possessive and demonstrative pronouns. Thus in Mpongwe we have :—

mpono	yino	yi	kendia	go	nkali	yi	reri	yami
road	this	he	takes	to	village	this	one	of father my.

4. The equivalence and permutation of certain consonants according to fixed rules, both in the conjugation of verbs, in the "concord," and in the transfer of a root or word from one language to another. Thus the Mobangi word *motoba* (six) becomes *orowa* in Mpongwe. Some of these consonants have such a tendency to be transformed into one another that in certain dialects they are given an intermediate pronunciation, which is very difficult for us to catch. *T* is not distinguished from *r*, *l* from *d*, *j* from *v* or consonantal *ü*.

With few exceptions the pronunciation of these languages is very easy for Europeans ; the accentuation is rather slight, and the words are delivered with uniform stress and *recto tono*. All syllables are enunciated clearly except for an elision to avoid hiatus. This precise pronunciation and the strong articulation of consonants lends the speech of some tribes a certain childlike character.

The grammar is often extremely complicated. A European requires long practice and constant association with the natives in order to assimilate the numerous classes of singular and plural prefixes, the rules of "concord," and the superabundant forms of the tenses of the verb, and there are few persons indeed who succeed in observing all these rules correctly and with facility. The most advanced of these dialects are susceptible of real elegance in style and expression. A system of suffixes and reduplications fills their vocabularies with augmentatives, diminutives, frequentatives, and privatives, and a whole family of words is grouped about the verb, such as : to cause a second person to perform the action expressed by the verb ; to perform it for some one, or in favour of some one ; to perform it frequently or continuously ; to destroy what has been done ; to restore what has been destroyed once before, etc.

Their syntax is, on the contrary, exceedingly simple,

following the logical order of subject, verb, and predicate. Whatever the limiting word may be, it always follows the thing limited.

The psychological study of the individual will lead me more than once to resume this interesting question of language under other aspects.

In spite of the similarity of their dialects, it is noticeable that different tribes do not understand one another. It requires a less superficial mind than that of the Negro to discover identities of grammar and syntax, and to compare roots which, in being carried over from one dialect to another, have suffered changes that disguise them more or less. Accordingly, by the side of these languages, which one might call national, there are international languages, which furnish a means of mutual understanding to a group of tribes that have constant political or commercial relations with one another. Like Esperanto, these *sabirs* have borrowed the words most extensively used in the national languages; they admit no complicated forms, and have reduced the grammar to the simplest rules.

I shall say only a word about the third ethnic group of that part of Tropical Africa which I am considering. We have just seen that the multitudinous races which are, wrongly or rightly, classed under the general name of Bantu spread over the humid region of the vast Congo Basin. From north to south there descended another current, which struck the borders of this same fluvial basin at about the fourth degree north latitude. Perhaps the tribes of this latter region offered resistance, or the strangers, who came from a dry climate, were physiologically unfit to endure humidity, or else they found it impossible to grow the grains which were their ordinary food, in unsuitable soil. At all events, the invaders, when driven back by the pressure of the Islamized tribes of the north, scarcely encroached upon the barrier of the forests, but settled in long, wavy lines which ran parallel to the equator, and in some cases

embraced as much as ten degrees of longitude. Their interminglings are even more confused than those of the Bantu races, because of the terrible attacks to which the Moslem Sudanese subjected them, and, as they have hitherto been the object of very little study, their origin and relationships are not at all well known. For this reason, and also because many of them have been affected in various degrees by the political and religious influence of Islam, I shall mention them only incidentally in this work, when I can extract from them plain facts which are manifestly free from every foreign taint.

BOOK II

PSYCHOLOGY OF  
THE INDIVIDUAL





PASSING judgment upon other people is an act of presumption from which the general run of mankind does not shrink, but which is nevertheless fraught with peril. Eminent philosophers have analysed the reasons for its liability to error, and I can best sum them up by resorting to a commonplace, but expressive, metaphor. This point of criticism is so important that I too must discuss it ; for perhaps it will show plainly the true nature of the differences which separate Negrophiles from Negrophobes, though I have no illusions about my power of convincing either side or of bringing them together.

Every man has in front of his judgment something which is like a bit of coloured glass, and which represents an aggregate of inherited or acquired ideas, prejudices, interests, desires, and sensations that are derived from tradition, physiological or pathological peculiarities and surrounding influences. When he observes, everything that he sees assumes an exclusive, personal hue, which seems to him the only true and reasonable one, simply because he has nothing with which to compare it, and every subject presented to it for reference is found to be invested by it with the general colour-scheme.

The uniform orientation and the essentially subjective nature of our contact with others therefore prevent us from forming a sound judgment as to their actions, which are differently oriented from our own. Certain lines of conduct and certain features of manners and customs may seem absurd, mad, or immoral, when

viewed by our peculiar eyes ; and yet they are always logical in relation to the motives which have guided their authors, but which have escaped our particular sort of vision.

The ease of their material existence, the mildness of the climate and the unchanging monotony of their daily occupations have kept the African Negroes in an extremely narrow psychological sphere, which contrasts with the complex mentality of civilized men.

We should by no means hold them to strict account for this state of affairs, for the causes of their savage condition are not in themselves, nor in any stubborn and systematic opposition to our manifest superiority. These causes lie outside of them and at the same time within them, being dictated by their adaptation to the environment, as well as by the double instinct of individual and racial conservation. Hence let us not seek to gauge these primitive natures by our complex intellectual endowment, let us not weigh their childlike notions and limited brain capacity with the weights of our inherited aptitudes, our moral subtlety and our scientific speculations. The analysis of their psychology entails a perpetual *quid pro quo*, and the student has only too often been caught in the snares of over-minute dissection, an instinctive desire to find something even where there is nothing, and a natural inclination to classify a subject whose essential characteristic is vagueness and lack of precision.

For sound appreciation of a race which is psychologically very different from one's own, one must become completely identified with the natives of that race, must share their life, speak their language, think their thoughts, and feel their desires and passions. One must become a native without losing one's own identity, and must interpenetrate the native mind to such an extent that psychological investigation is reduced to a sort of self-examination. But this exclusion of self, even if it were possible, would not give one absolute

satisfaction. In my own case, although I lived for many years among the African tribes, although I know several of their languages, and have made attempts to assimilate the inner processes of their thought, the deepest delving has given me only vague and floating notions. Not only that, but when out of my small knowledge I tried to give adequate expression to my observations or impressions, I was betrayed by the terminology—lacked the proper word. Did I wish to express myself, it seemed as though I must perforce make use of the native languages themselves, whose vocabulary, in spite of, or rather because of, its poverty, was better adapted to the rudimentary psychology of the indigenes.

The study of languages is the best guide for one who would fain dive very deeply into the nature of a race. The spoken tongue is the most faithful mirror of a people's ideas, for it is their immediate product. There is complete identity and superposition between a dialect and the mind which has created it, and the only difficulty which one encounters is that of interpretation, which runs great risk of taking an impress from the translator in the process of passing from one language to another. No other proof of this is needed save our utter inability to express ourselves like the Natives, even though we have a perfect knowledge of their vocabulary and grammar. In addition to the equivalence of words, which is never more than approximated in different languages, there are idioms whose true form one cannot master without great difficulty. But what is absolutely inimitable, because it is foreign to our nature, is the Natives' very peculiar mimicry, the exclamations which interrupt their speech, their onomatopœias and little cries, the repetition and reduplication of words, and their turns of phraseology, which they illustrate with a by-play so out of harmony with the genius of our language that we cannot adopt all its whims and reproduce all its phases.

This suggests the question whether the psychology of the African Negroes is everywhere sufficiently uniform to lend itself to monographic treatment. Within the boundaries to which I intend to confine the subject, it is ; for I mean to limit myself to what I have personally observed and studied. More than once we shall verify the fact that the Blacks of Equatorial Africa are almost identical in their general features. They form a homogeneous psychological species, and represent a quite distinct stepping-stone of humanity. To tell the truth, both individuals and collectivities do exhibit slight divergences in detail ; but, as we shall soon see, these only serve to make plain the way in which their general character reacts under the special conditions of their environment.

## CHAPTER I

### MEN OF THE WOODS AND MEN OF THE PLAINS

IT is necessary at the outset to make a distinction between the various races which are the subject of this investigation ; but in doing so I cannot be reproached with inventing an arbitrary classification to suit the exigencies of the case, for the two classes which I discriminate—men of the woods and men of the plains—are perfectly natural, and denote two separate species in a geographical as well as a psychological sense. Nowhere else, perhaps, do the close relations between man as a moral agent and his surrounding environment appear more conspicuous than here.

The Fan and his native land shall furnish my type of the first class.

The Fan's country is everywhere a dense virgin forest, sombre, silent, and monotonous. In certain parts there is a thick growth of brush, alternating with a large herbaceous plant, which is a kind of amomum, from nine to twelve feet in height, and which grows in a tangled mass above the path, forming a pliant but unyielding obstacle to one's progress. Elsewhere the undergrowth becomes thinner, and the track winds between enormous forest trees. This, however, makes walking no easier, for one must stride across projecting roots and climb over gigantic trunks felled by time, and one's foot slips on a thick litter of dead leaves,

sticks in a soft paste of rotten wood, and trips over heaps of dead branches. There is no sound and no motion, and, save for the noisy cawing of a few toucans high up among the leafy arches, the forest seems to be a lifeless solitude.

But let your caravan pass on ; stay behind alone, and take your seat upon a big rock. Do not move, and before long, when the noise of steps and voices has died away in the distance, you will have the feeling of an intense life, but one that is concealed. You will hear unobtrusive sounds, shy chirps, whispers, furtive steps on the dry leaves, the crackling of dead wood and the strident cry of cicadae. You will notice a great commotion in the verdure, as it is shaken by the frolics of a company of monkeys, the clucking sound of whose sentinels you will hear. And beneath this grand melody of the woods you will perceive, like the continuous bass of its secret harmony, the formidable crunching noises of all the tiny creatures produced by Nature, such as destructive larvæ and insects with sharp mandibles. The animal world, like yourself, seems imbued with a religious veneration for these imposing naves, and lowers its voice instinctively as though beneath the sombre arches of some ancient cathedral. The thick ceiling of ever-green foliage crushes you ; the heavy, vapid humidity oppresses you, and the greenish twilight is a torture. Here is no mirth, no joyousness : naught save apprehension and sadness ; for here Nature is man's wicked stepmother. She refuses him the nourishment which is necessary to preserve his life ; for the trees keep their fruits at inaccessible heights, and hunting in the forest is a lottery. She denies him the sun, his source of health and happiness, and plants no grass to solace his eye, nor even a bit of moss where he may stretch his weary limbs.

Suddenly an apparition rises up before you : there is a native within a stone's-throw of you, though you have not heard his approach, for the passing of your

caravan is already known in the vicinity. The Pawan who accosts you has advanced with due precaution, not revealing his presence until assured of your peaceful intentions. He, too, is racially under the profound mental suggestion of the forest. Continuous abode for a long series of generations beneath these gloomy overarching trees and among this undergrowth which is so favourable to ambush, an existence subject to constant menace in the harsh forest, and a sort of confinement in this verdant prison which checks the soul's buoyancy and inhibits the movements of the body—all render the Fan a wary creature, suspicious, litigious, quarrelsome, crafty, and dishonest, as a rule. To these influences he likewise owes his nasal, harsh, and guttural speech, which seems more fitted to express anger and violence than poetry and love.

The forest is well policed. It swarms with spies, who study the movements of every unusual creature, whether animal or human. It has secret paths, which one cannot enter save by leaping across the trunk of a tree or a clump of ferns, or by crawling on all fours under a dense thicket. In his gloomy dwelling-place the man of the woods leads an uneasy life, disturbed by incessant alarms. He mistrusts everything, and no one can tell what sly and tortuous motives regulate his conduct. When taken from his native thickets and brought out into broad daylight he seems as dazzled and confused as a bat blinded by the light. His darkened intellect blinks in the free and spacious world like an eye suddenly brought out of the dark into the glare of the midday sun, and he is in haste to return and lodge once more in his damp and gloomy den.

The man of the plains is quite different. In his country there are enormous spaces scorched by the sun, and broad horizons deluged with golden mists. There is a vast extent of sky and land, and the eye

wanders untrammelled from one plane of the immense panorama to the other, fastening upon the sinuosities of a river, a clump of palms, or the snowy whiteness of a cliff. One's thought soars unconfined and imagines in the distance what the eye can no longer see. Vegetation lays aside her majesty, as though to make herself more gracious to man and to bring herself down to his level. She proffers her branches, flowers, and fruits almost within reach of his hand. Nature is no longer a giant who domineers and crushes, but a smiling host. The air circulates and the wind blows. One's lungs expand, one's mind is eased, one's heart is merry ; and though the heat is intense, it is dry and wholesome. The sun incites to mirth, the space calls one and makes one want to be off at a run. One feels, as it were, an expansion of one's being and a dilatation of one's life to the limits of the visible world.

The man of the plains bears the ancestral mark of this broad, free life ; for he is merry and exuberant, loving noise and singing, and his drolleries and playfulness make one forgive his faults. He is artless, trusting, and even hospitable ; a little more and he would be honest. He is not devoid of generosity. He is prone to pranks, perceiving the comical side of persons and things with a rare talent for observation and sly humour. He is not suspicious unless he has been too often deceived, and is comparatively faithful ; for he keeps his promises as long as he remembers them. His language is soft and sonorous, full of imagery, colour, and movement.

Having thus described the two most contrasting general types of the races which we are investigating, I shall now attempt to sketch the psychological features which they possess in common, pointing out the deformations in each type as we proceed.



## CHAPTER II

### THE SENSES AND APPETITES

THE Negro is rather inferior to the European in the acuteness of his senses. I am well aware that this statement is apparently quite gratuitous, and that it should be verified by accurate physiological experiments. But, unfortunately, experimentation seems to me quite impracticable, if one wishes to obtain certainty and accuracy. Most of its processes demand that the patient shall yield himself to them intelligently, and shall realize what is expected of him. You need hope for nothing of the kind from the Negro. I have often noticed how the clinical examination of sick Natives is hindered by impediments due to the patients themselves. When one attempts to make them breathe, count, cough, assume certain positions, or supple themselves, their awkwardness in these actions is so great that it reduces medical observation to purely objective indications, as in the case of children and animals. Hence we must be satisfied with the superficial observation sufficient for our present object.

The sense of touch seems less delicate than in the European : a matter of skin and rearing. Habits of rough work, nudity, the sun's fierceness, the light touches of shrubs and grass along the road, abrasions caused by thorns and half-burned stubble deaden cutaneous sensibility : a phenomenon which can be attributed only to the hardening of the epidermis under the influence of these same agents. Yet the thick, horny sole on the plantar surface, due to going barefooted, does

not at all lessen the sensation of titillation ; and no matter how accustomed the Negro is to walk on the burning earth, it sometimes makes him very uncomfortable during days of great heat. Yet one may often see him pick live coals out of the fire and light his pipe with them.

The Negro has no courage when attacked by internal diseases, but moans and complains over the mildest indispositions ; he is afraid of this unknown thing that is happening in his vitals. We shall see the reasons for this when we come to study his religion. On the contrary, he bears the most severe wounds with stoicism. Among some of the tribes on the Lower Ubangi the scars with which men and women are liberally seamed show an indifference to cuts, as well as a brutality of manners and customs not belied by their animal physiognomy.

The incisions and mutilations which all Negroes inflict upon the body as distinctive signs of their tribe and a realization of their ideal of beauty betoken an obtusion of sensibility analogous to that which criminologists have noted in the degenerate. Not only are they a cause of suffering at the time of the operation, but sometimes they also entail frightful inconvenience throughout the whole lifetime. With a battered iron knife, rough and without an edge, or with a bit of earthenware, either alone or with a comrade's aid, they make regular rows of incisions around the navel, on both sides of the median line of the abdomen,<sup>1</sup> on the chest, the face, and, more rarely, upon the limbs. They often encourage the formation of keloids and of swellings in the flesh by means of irritant substances, or by keeping the edges of the wound raised by means of balls of tow or splinters of wood.

<sup>1</sup> Some persons think that the prominent cicatrices (keloids) which result from incisions upon the abdomen have the effect of lending a more lascivious charm to the *jeu de l'amour*.

I shall have occasion elsewhere to discuss again the significance of this sort of tattooing. It is sufficient for me to show here that the African races fear physical pain less than we do, or, rather, less than we do at the present time. For in past ages, before the softening of manners and customs and the comforts of life had rendered our sensibilities more acute, harshness of character, barbarity of customs, an almost continuous state of war, and a pitiless and cruel code of penal laws could not but be connected with a comparative obtusion of sensitiveness to pain.

There is little to say about taste and smell. The chapter on social life will give me an opportunity to speak of the Negro's inconceivable appetite for horrid food, such as carrion and the decayed entrails of the hippopotamus.

Sight and hearing possess none of those marvellous qualities with which travellers and novelists have endowed the savage. The Negro neither sees nor hears better than do we, even in the bush. He is simply more accustomed to the sights and sounds of his native land. It is the education of his senses, not their keenness, which enables him to distinguish game among the thick foliage or to recognize the distant summons of the war-drum. In this respect we are no whit inferior to him; indeed, we reassert our superiority as soon as we have adapted our eyes and ears to the conditions of the African environment.

Among the Negro's peculiar tastes, cannibalism deserves special mention.

Cannibalism is an ordinary practice in Central Africa, even in districts which are the richest in alimentary resources of all kinds, both vegetable and animal. Hence man is not led to adopt it by privation, by the imperious and animal need of satisfying his

hunger. It is simply a matter of taste, the preference for a favourite kind of game.

Certain tribes indulge in a moderate cannibalism, not because of hunger or greed, but in a spirit of reprisal—almost of religion. “Even in time of famine,” says the Rev. Père Martrou,<sup>1</sup> “the Fan does not hunt man to satisfy his hunger; he eats only the bodies of his enemies slain in battle. This he does but rarely, and only when he dreams of a terrible revenge; for the man who is eaten will have no honours of burial. His soul will wander in the dark, cold forest; and between the village of the man who has been devoured and the village of him who has offered this public insult there will henceforth be inextinguishable hatred. Woman, who is the ordinary cook among the Pawans, for once gives up her place. The men, who are unskilled in this art, hang the meat, cook it a short time in pots, and share this secret repast alone, far away from the women and children.”

The cannibal is not necessarily, as is too often thought, a ferocious individual, a blood-tainted tiger, a murderous monomaniac. I should not care to have the appearance of attempting to rehabilitate an odious custom. But, whatever one may say, there is nothing in common between the Negro man-eater and our own criminal degenerate. The *uomo delinquente* is a monstrosity, a being outside Nature's pale. One fears for one's life in quarters frequented by such degenerates, while one is safe among cannibals, unless one is at war with them. There is no comparison to be made between these two types, one placed at the birth of society, the other at its decline. The second belongs to social pathology; the first is a healthy, normal product.

Cannibalism, then, is not an instinct, but a custom. Jestings apart, it depends upon a peculiar conception, which is doubtless barbarous and savage, of one's

<sup>1</sup> Eki.

relationship with the stranger and the slave. This in no wise hinders one who indulges in it from being in everyday life a gentle, merry, playful individual, with whom intercourse is pleasing, at least for his friends. Do not look for conscious wickedness in him, or for depravity. Outside the tribe, and in a more restricted sense outside the family, he recognizes no humanity, or, as we should say, no "kindred." Every other man is a "barbarian" in the ancient sense of the word, and as such is an abject and contemptible being, of strange and ridiculous manners and customs, with whom treaties are made when necessity compels, but who is hunted and ferreted out when possible, and who is eaten like butcher's meat from the Ubangi to the Chinko, and over a large portion of the Belgian Congo.

In spite of the denials of certain persons, I have often had proof and have personally ascertained that some tribes<sup>1</sup> take prisoners of war or buy slaves in order to keep them in reserve and afterwards to slaughter them and eat them according to their needs. Twenty years ago in the riverain villages of the Middle Ubangi one could see the stool to which the victim was bound. A few paces behind it a flexible pole was driven into the ground. This was bent and the extremity was fastened to the victim's head by a liana. Thus, after decapitation, the pole sprang back and lifted the bleeding trophy into the air, amid the acclamations of the crowd, who stood applauding the executioner's strength and skill. And among the Nzakaras, in all the villages, and at the entrance to the residence of their king Bangasu, every one could see the trees where hung, like sinister fruits, the skulls of conquered and eaten Bubus. It appears that on the Sankuru the arms and legs of the wretched victim were broken, and he was then immersed in a running

<sup>1</sup> The Nzakaras and the peoples who are wrongly grouped under the general name of Bondjos.

stream for one whole night, to make his flesh tender. The desire of lending piquancy to their narratives makes me suspicious of those refinements of cruelty which travellers have attributed to the African cannibals. The simple reality is quite enough, without making it worse by imaginary horrors. One must also take into account the exaggeration resulting from reports of isolated facts, regrettable examples of which are to be found among all peoples.<sup>1</sup> By a very natural illusion the reader is led to generalize from exceptions, which are given undue prominence by their isolation from the main body of facts.

African cannibalism is in a fair way to disappear rapidly ; for when brought into contact with other and more civilized tribes the cannibal has a feeling of shame, and soon no longer dares to acknowledge that human flesh is still eaten in his village.

<sup>1</sup> See my study, "Psychologie de l'Européen aux pays chauds," in the *Revue générale des Sciences pures et appliquées*, 1906.

### CHAPTER III

## FICKLENESS OF THE NATIVE CHARACTER

THE one dominating feature of the Negro's psychology is the fickle instability of his impressions and sensations, which merely graze his consciousness, leaving nothing but a transient mark upon it. He lacks either stability or intellectual and moral memory, and exhibits inconstancy in every ramification of his mental activity. He lives under the influence of the moment, indifferent to the lessons of a past which is already forgotten, and careless of the future. The present, whether good or evil, obliterates the joys and sorrows of the instant which has just taken flight. If the present is agreeable, he enjoys it to more than satiety ; if not, he endures it resignedly and without protest, allowing himself to be carried along by circumstances, as though by an omnipotent force which it were vain to resist. Fatalism and the fascination which the present exerts upon him attain a truly extraordinary height, of which the following is a characteristic example :—

There are certain man-eating tribes living on the Lower Ubangi who preserve their human game for the necessities of daily consumption in the manner which I have already mentioned. The appointed victims enjoy comparative freedom while awaiting their end, and are denied none of the delights which render the Negro's life attractive, such as idleness, good food, a soft bed, and so on. The captain of a French

steamer, who had put in at one of these villages in order to buy provisions and wood, recognized, in the crowd which came running down to the river-bank, a man who was a stranger to that district, and who had lately served as steersman on his boat. When questioned as to what he was doing there, the man replied that he was a captive in the village, and as such was destined some day or other to fill the cooking-pot of his masters. The captain thereupon offered to carry him off. It would have been an easy matter, for the man would only have had to leap to the bridge of the vessel while the crew overawed the villagers with their guns, and the boat would then have steamed off at full speed. He refused, because at the time he was enjoying all the luxuries of life, and the prospect of the knife had consequently no power to disturb him. The boat left without him.



## CHAPTER IV

### EGOISM AND ALTRUISM

THE Negroes' feelings of affection are occasionally warm, though they are usually transient. A certain number of their languages express the words *love* and *wish* or *desire* by the same term. This confusion has quite a philosophical import, for it would indicate that platonic love is unknown on the African map of the tender passions. Nevertheless, love sometimes appears to take on a slight tinge of sentimentality. Instances are not rare ; neither are they frequent. Among the Fans feuds have been known to result from the abduction of a woman by her lover, with the object of removing her from a father's tyranny and the addresses of a detested suitor. In a village on the banks of the Ngoko I once witnessed a touching scene. Two lovers, seated in the village square, were holding one another in a most unconstrained embrace, showing something more than mere carnal love in their looks, attitudes, and gestures—even in their silence.

Among the Blacks maternal love is what it is everywhere. It is made up of solicitude, assiduities, and abnegation, and the mother's devotion to her child is absolute and unceasing.

The father is more restrained in his affection for his offspring. Occasionally he permits himself to take his child in his arms and to walk or play with it, and he pets it and coddles it when he feels inclined ; but these attempts at effusiveness never detain him long.

Both among cannibals and the less bloodthirsty tribes of Africa, as, indeed, is everywhere the case, woman partakes of such instincts characteristic of her sex as sentimentality, nervousness, caprice, and the desire to please. She begs for gifts, loves finery, and is flattered by compliments to her charms, which even the most frightful shrew appreciates. She delights in pretty ways, loves little children, tiny dogs, and small birds, which she caresses lackadaisically, uttering flutelike exclamations, such as "How sweet he is, my dear!" Should a strange mother come into a village with her little one, every woman is eager to take the child in turn, to hold him in her arms, to dandle him, jump him up and down, and tickle him to make him laugh.<sup>1</sup>

The Native feelings of affection are superficial, partaking of the fickleness of the Negro character. Grief does not long outlast a relative's death, and the noisier its manifestations the more ephemeral they are. The first concern of a woman who has lost her husband is to rush headlong through the village, uttering cries of grief and piteous shrieks, proclaiming the fatal event and reciting the dead man's praises in a sort of funeral rhapsody. It is a kind of musical invitation to the obsequies. The family, friends, and neighbours assemble in the hut of the deceased, so that they may lament there in chorus. The ease with which the women who have been least intimate with the dead find tears to weep for him is truly remarkable. They shed real tears, and sob in downright earnest. If some comical fellow utters a jesting word in the assembly, every one bursts out laughing, but, once the mirth has subsided, each one pulls himself together, recalling the reason of his being where he is, and the wailing women resume their plaintive songs and sobs. The men weep little or not at all.

<sup>1</sup> Negroes are entirely ignorant of kissing.

Friendship and hatred are two feelings as superficial as the rest. In natures so fickle hatred loses its essential quality of stubbornness and dwindles down to fear or the instinct of self-preservation, or, according to circumstances, to the desire of compensating oneself for an injury that has been done to one. The feuds which last longest are kept up less by a deep feeling of censure than by an exchange of crimes which each side commits in turn.

Friendship does not extend beyond simple companionship. When circumstances bring two men together they are united by a momentary bond, which is based upon self-interest and mutual protection. They are devoted to one another, are in perfect harmony, and share one another's waistcloths, pipes, and manioc like brothers. But should circumstances change or fortune suddenly tack about, each goes his way and, as soon as their backs are turned, each forgets the other, and they become strangers.

Forms of salutation vary according to district. Handshaking is almost universal, but is performed with a nerveless pressure which lacks strength and warmth. There are likewise verbal forms of greeting and reply to acts of civility. The Fan language has none, but, to make up for this lack, when the polite Pawan wishes to show his pleasure at meeting a friend, he places him upon his knees and holds him in his embrace. In all districts the greatest courtesy one can show a friend is to invite him to share one's food. For such an occasion meat is procured if possible, a fowl is killed, and the best palm-kernels are selected, so that fresh oil may be extracted from them.

But no matter what sort of demonstrations they may make, the motive of self-interest is paraded with frank artlessness. Friendship is barely distinguished from the egoistical impulse which makes a man love his neighbour for his own sake, for the pleasure he gives him, and for the benefits he can confer upon him.

He would, indeed, be very severe or very hypocritical who should reproach the African for being so candidly self-centred. As an almost isolated member of social groups which are spread over immense territories he is attached to his nearest fellows by the slenderest ties, and only by such a feeling of mutual responsibility as is necessary in order to triumph over the forces of Nature, to struggle against her inclemencies, to overcome the sterility of the soil, to check encroaching vegetation, and to repulse the fierce attacks of the smallest beings of the animal kingdom. As he is thus left to depend almost entirely upon his own powers, man perforce learns to trust in himself alone, and, moreover, as we shall see later on, the group of which he is a member is so small that it seems no more than an extension of its component parts. From earliest youth every one learns to act for himself, to expect nothing from others, and, conversely, not to offer his services to others. When a village is threatened the common danger awakens a slight feeling of fellowship, part of which is due to the apprehension of peril and part to the necessity of contributing to the defence of the place ; and thus the first outlines of altruism appear. Altruism is certainly only a form of selfishness in the beginning, but it eventually becomes purified and evolves into a sort of increasingly complete externalization of the ego. In its highest development it embodies the pleasures and pains of others, makes one feel them as though they were one's own, and thus becomes the source of tenderness, kindness, piety, and charity.

Among the savages whom we are studying the community expects to be repaid for the assistance which it grants each of its members, and hence the unfit of every kind are ruthlessly rejected. Unlike modern civilization, which has more sentimentality for individuals than concern for the preservation of society

itself, the Negro world has not yet discovered how, by defying both Nature and man, life may be kept in all those whose physical and moral defects destroy public health and corrupt the public conscience. In these primitive communities the law of selection operates with inexorable severity. The man without a family, who is old and weak and unfit to play his part in society, need hope for no pity. He is flouted and reviled, and left in a corner like a mangy cur. He rots in foulness and is covered with repulsive sores ; he is visited only by flies and vermin ; he feeds on a filthy mess of pounded earth and refuse which he cooks in potsherds. He is resigned, for he possesses the fatalism of his race, and, realizing that he is useless and despicable, does not attempt to extricate himself from his dreadful situation, but passively endures the scorn of all. Some morning he is found dead on his dunghill.

But the mind of man, even of Black Man, is full of inconsistencies and contradictions. On rare occasions I have succeeded in disturbing a Negro's egoism and in arousing in him a transient impulse of compassion for some such wretch who was exposed to the jeers and insults of the crowd. "If you grow old and ill one day," I would say to him, "like this poor devil, you will be glad to have some one give you a little food." He would agree that perhaps the White Man was in the right, and would readily give some provisions to the unfortunate. An instant later the generous impulse was forgotten, but at least for a brief moment one of these unmoral natures had been illumined by a gleam of kindness—the faint auto-suggestion of a neighbour's pain.

The Negro has not an innate sense of kindness, and accordingly does not understand the motives of our benevolence towards him. If he were capable of reflection and analysis, it would be only one more case in which we would appear most extraordinary to him.

He does not comprehend how any one can do another a service which is not justified by an immediate return ; but he has so little understanding of the kindness which we show him, either from compassion or the desire of securing his gratitude, that it does not even surprise him. He passively enjoys its results, simply affirming that " the White Man is good." Worse still, he seems to think that when he accepts our benefits we are the ones who are under the obligation, that our philanthropy is a natural effulgence—the satisfaction of a need, and that, in short, our intellectual superiority and our powerful means of accomplishing results allow us to do good without any effort. We have all had the experience of seeing a patient wait after we have treated him. One asks, " What do you want now? " And one gets the incredible answer, " Are you not going to give me a present? " Following the same sequence of ideas, a merchant will unblushingly ask you for a gratuity to compensate him for having sold you some article.

What rudiments of altruism the Negro has are primarily concerned with his immediate circle, those beings who are nearest akin to him, and with whom he is closely connected by interests which concern his safety and his food supply. Generally speaking, he appears rather harsh to others, especially to persons who do not belong to his family, village, or tribe. His neighbours are only those with whom he is in the closest touch, and without a guarantee of safety it is imprudent to wander away from this narrow circle, if one would avoid the risk of slavery or death ; for the stranger is an enemy and a prey.

The Negro is inquisitive about the language and the manners and customs of other tribes, but he always regards them with a marked tinge of pride and contempt. Anything new always appears ridiculous to him.

Vanity, pretentiousness, stupidity, and tyranny grow

out of his artless egoism, the narrowness and meanness of his daily cares and his childish nature. No one is so scornful of a Negro and so harsh to him as another Negro who fancies himself in some way superior to his coloured brother. An embroidered jacket, a hat trimmed with lace, or even a single worn-out shoe is a title of nobility and confers the right to be insolent. But let him among civilized men cast the first stone who is not dazzled by the prestige of a uniform and by honorific distinctions.

## CHAPTER V

### THE NATIVE CONCEPTION OF TRUTH

MAN'S idea of truth never is and never can be anything but conventional and provisional. It is probable that it approaches absolute truth asymptotically,<sup>1</sup> but meanwhile it depends upon a series of physiological and mental operations, whose methods are imperfect and their conclusions uncertain. Its usefulness is closely connected with the refinement of the subject's senses, his physical and moral condition, his degree of culture, his passions and his prejudices. What wonder, then, if the conception of truth is far more imperfect in primitive man than in the superior races?

We have seen that the evidence of the senses is not noticeably more deceptive in the Negro than in ourselves. But his interpretation of this evidence is necessarily more imperfect, for it is subjected to a thousand deformations by the peculiar traits of his character, such as egoism, levity, inattention, puerility, and vanity. We may add as other causes of error the uncertainty of an existence which is constantly menaced by other men, by wild animals, and by the elements; the fierce struggle and cruel exigencies to which the savage is subject in the bosom of stubborn Nature; and, lastly, superstition, by which I mean certain concepts that are as obscure to the African as to ourselves. Self-interest, caprice, and a coarse mysticism are the only standards by which he measures

<sup>1</sup> Not "asymptomatiquement," as the text reads.—*Trans.*



events as they manifest themselves. Occasionally he carries this aberration to an incredible pitch. In the chapter on Justice we shall see him doubting his own innocence, testifying against himself, acknowledging himself guilty of absurd crimes, and putting greater faith in the verdict of a trial by ordeal than in the voice of his own conscience. This strange blindness would surprise us more if our own history were not filled with similar facts. How many sorcerers, when confronted with the stake, have loudly proclaimed their magic practices, their participation in the nocturnal revels of the Witches' Sabbath and their intercourse with the devil !

One will immediately understand what slight reliance can be placed on the most explicit assertions of a Negro, especially when his childish vanity, his feeling of importance and the petty glory of astonishing his acquaintances are involved. One should listen to the conversations of small groups around the fire of an evening when it is the hour for story-telling and discussion.

" You lie ! "

" It is the truth, upon my word ! "

Such are the exclamations which cross and recross every moment. The epithet of liar insults no one, for everybody has a right to it.

To the Negro truth is not a single, objective entity, independent of the subject's interpretation, but is pre-eminently multiple and subjective. His fickle mind, given over to momentary impressions, unconsciously transforms truth in accordance with the necessities of the case, promptly treats the new version as identical with the old, and thereupon believes in the genuineness of its own fabrications.

## CHAPTER VI

### NEGRO HONESTY, INTEGRITY, AND EQUITY

THE Negro has little or no respect for an oath under ordinary conditions, but more when it is consecrated by a religious ceremony, or when one of the two parties concerned impresses the other by a certain reputation for genuine respectability. Accordingly, the alliance of blood-brotherhood, celebrated with the usual ceremonies and antics, is a solemn act, whose engagements are observed for a fairly long period. Likewise everything which concerned Europeans was scrupulously respected when they first made their way into the country, before more intimate association with the Natives and the employment of vulgar subordinates had sullied the prestige of the White race, and before the abuse of summary procedure and the performance of actions that were only too often unfair had proved that the invaders were capable of felony. Merchandise which was deposited with the chiefs was restored untouched and in a perfect state of preservation after lying forgotten for several years in the villages. But since that golden age matters have indeed changed.

Far be it from me to intimate that the fidelity of such depositaries was instigated by an innate sense of integrity alone. The articles involved were of great value to a Negro, and the temptation was strong. Yet at that time French officials were very few in number and the police force was nil, so to speak. Under these

circumstances the Negro's comparative honesty should therefore be attributed to an aggregate of very diverse causes. We may grant him, to begin with, a leaven of conscience. But over against this embryonic virtue we must set the character of the leaders who at that time were directing French colonial expansion, the political course which they pursued, the authority and importance with which they had surrounded themselves, and the almost superstitious respect which the Natives felt for everything that personally concerned them. The Negro does not understand abstract ideas, nor does he see things in the aggregate. In doing a piece of work he does not see the object, which is too remote for his short-sighted vision, but only the individual who is directing him at a given time.<sup>1</sup> The European will continue to be respected as long as he knows how to keep his demi-god's halo unspotted. But the moment he is recognized as a human being, with the weaknesses and vices of such, the Natives will deceive and rob him unblushingly. It is for this reason—taking no account of the half-civilized Negro's depravity—that, until quite recently, it was less difficult to find honest servants among the savages of the interior, who were little accustomed to the Whites, than among the people of the coast. For the same reason, other things being equal, the better one is able to preserve his dignity before his Native acquaintances and to command their respect, the less chance he runs of being cheated. And this respect depends much less upon the use of harshness and corporal punishment than upon the White Man's correct deportment, upright conduct, integrity, and honesty.

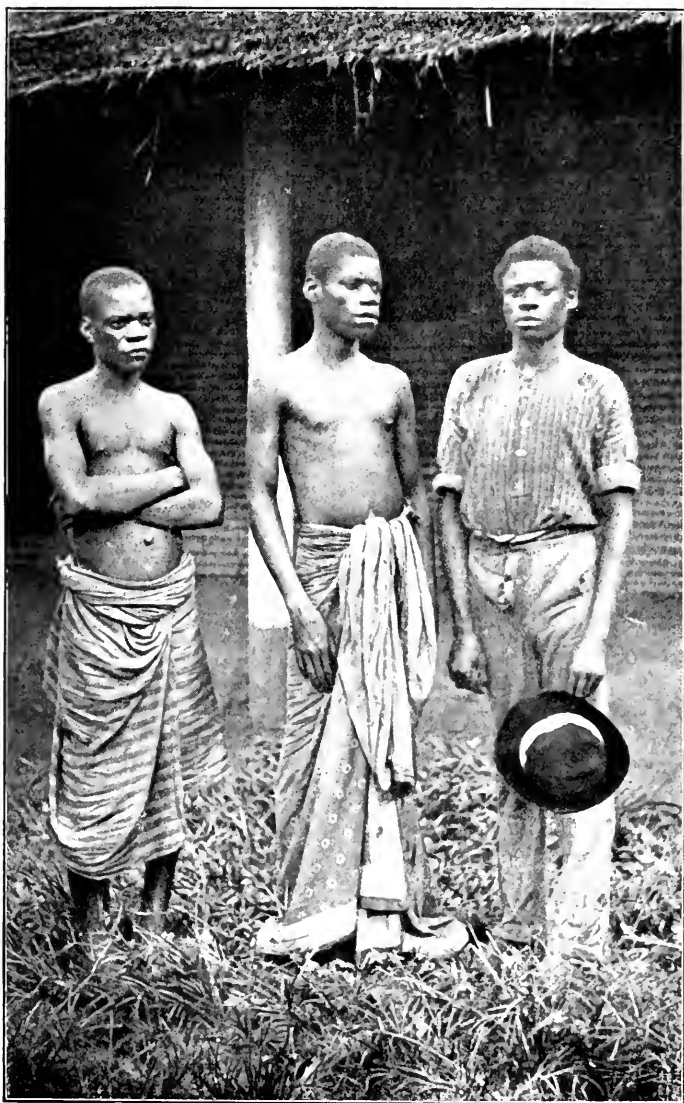
<sup>1</sup> The vertiginous changes which have taken place in officials of every rank and degree during the last twelve or fifteen years have been one of the major causes of this unfortunate colony's stagnation. Not to speak of the delay and confusion which have resulted in the progress of affairs, the natives have been literally maddened by the incessant changes of administration, transfers of authority, and inconsistencies in political policy and legislative enactment.

The Negro is stupid in his dishonesty, and cheats in an inanely foolish manner. He is not a dexterous thief, but lacks imagination even in wrongdoing. He is a dull rogue and a robber who has no natural talent.

All primitive peoples have an innate sense of equity, though they are not high-minded enough to bestow it upon others to their own disadvantage, for that would be demanding of them a quality which is rare among the most cultured men. But, whether it be lenient or severe, the Negro understands it as applied by others to himself. I am not speaking of rewards alone, which are of course always accepted with pleasure. But a severe punishment seasonably inflicted does not excite his resentment. He readily accepts the theory of it, for it conforms to his ideas of justice and authority. A chief who is kind and generous and who can still proceed with rigour at the proper time is certain of his esteem and admiration. It is necessary that the punishment should follow close upon the crime, and that it should be proportioned to it ; and one should avoid carrying out one's own sentences. Under these conditions the effect of corporal punishment is excellent, and it is appreciated even by those to whom it is administered. Physical chastisement is the only curb which the Black Man understands, and which, when applied in moderation and without cruelty, satisfies both good order and humane feeling.

Prison is a resting-place for such fatalistic creatures. At Brazzaville, on the occasion of the National Fête, I once saw all the prisoners break gaol in order to go out and take part in the merrymakings. At six o'clock in the evening they all returned to the fold, and not one failed to answer the roll-call.

Another time a session of court was being held at an important place in the interior, when through the open window those present saw a tame elephant pass



*Plate IV.*

NEGRITOS—AKOWA OF THE GABOON.

To face page 62.



by, and learned that it had escaped from its master, who was a merchant in the locality. The audience immediately went off in a body in pursuit of the fugitive, the witnesses followed, then the prisoner's guards, and finally the prisoner himself, leaving the magistrate and his clerk alone in the courtroom. The animal was recovered, the prisoner came back deliberately to take his place and stand trial, and the proceedings were continued.

Hard labour succeeds no better, for it merely recalls to the Black his hereditary idea of slavery, and as such he endures it with his usual resignation. Indeed, all methods of coercion are discouraged by the inertia with which he confronts them.

Africans have a rather limited vocabulary of abuse. It contains some feeble words which are equivalent to *simpleton*, *fool*, and *idiot*, and also a few obscene expressions referring to the private parts of the interlocutor or his mother. Tone and gesture are what constitute an insult, for these expressions are not always used in an abusive sense, but are often given the simple meaning of indecent persiflage—a broad joke, which is meant to amuse the crowd at some one's expense.

## CHAPTER VII

### WORK

I HAVE no fear of making a paradoxical statement when I say that what we are continually being told of the Negro's idleness is sheer slander. He is not in the least idle, but simply unoccupied ; and there is no imperative reason why he should work more than he does. Unlike the civilized being, who is a veritable slave to his social instincts and his craving for improvement, the Negro does not belong to crowded masses inhabiting a country where land is sparingly doled out to man, where the very soil, impoverished by centuries of cultivation, is for ever forced to nourish starving multitudes, and where the harshness of the climate fiercely attacks life itself. In our communities the individual keeps afloat only by incessantly employing the most tremendous diligence, and the sluggard is he who is not energetic enough to provide for his own needs, who does not do his share of the work of the community, and who is a burden to his fellow-citizens.

Among primitive peoples the case is quite different, for the population is extremely scattered, so that there is no need to quarrel over the land in order to live. The Native's inactivity is simply a practical application of the law of least effort, and cannot be called idleness, save by comparison with our unrest, which would be fruitless, and, indeed, harmful to him in the existing conditions of his life. For Nature has no



middle term in her dealings with him. She either enervates him by a fertile soil and warm climate, or else she spurns and disheartens him by pitting him against forces which he cannot overcome, such as torrential rains, inundations, and the innumerable legions of animal life.

The harmony between man and Nature is still more clearly shown when one studies the different characters of the tribes which inhabit Equatorial Africa. One then realizes perfectly how a more arduous life and certain local necessities tend to develop ingenuity and to stimulate diligence and activity. Consider the Fan, for example. His incessant struggles against a refractory environment in the heart of the forests have rendered him, if not more industrious, at least more ingenious and headstrong than his neighbours who inhabit the open country. Herein unquestionably lies the secret of his irresistible expansion. Within the boundaries of the vast domain which he already occupies, his tireless, patient tenacity triumphs imperceptibly and mildly over tribes which have become enfeebled under a softer sky and among more civilized surroundings.

Accordingly, the Negro's inertness, his indifference, and his fatalism are intelligible traits of character, and have a logical connection. They make one understand the close tie which binds his character as a whole to the surroundings and conditions of life among which the races of Equatorial Africa have existed since the earliest times. When the Negro has provided for his temporary needs, or has acquired the object of his desire, he returns to his village and contentedly gives himself up to the delights of *dolce far niente*. He eats his fill, has his nap, and takes part in palavers. The future does not disturb him, for the repose of the present alone holds his mind captive. To him our restlessness is an unfathomable mystery. He cannot understand why the rich European does not stop

quietly in his own country, where he possesses all possible manner of good things, or why he endures so many hardships, or, again, why he is for ever travelling either for no apparent reason whatever, or simply to see countries which are just like other countries, with the same trees, rivers, villages, and men. Again, it seems to him particularly absurd and incomprehensible that any two Europeans, who are chatting together, are so mad as to pace back and forth or even to take a walk, instead of sitting beside the fire and talking comfortably. A young servant whom I had in the Zande country, and who was very bored at following me in my travels, cleverly summed up his Black brothers' opinions of our restless moods by saying that White Men were like grasshoppers, endlessly on the go. It is the same old theme to which Horace gave a more elegant turn long ago.

The Negro is not concerned about the future. He asks himself what is the use of heaping up riches which dampness will rot and the mandibles of the white ant will reduce to dust ; or what is the good of economizing for a future which is full of risks and disappointments. "I have what I eat," says he, "what is between my teeth ; to-day's feast of fish makes up to me for yesterday's fast. Let us hope that no malevolent spirits will rob us of to-morrow's dinner." To accumulate treasures under these circumstances would be madness.

His greatest happiness is to dazzle his fellows by an ostentatious display of his short-lived wealth. He will dress himself in a piece of stuff which he has earned after long service with some European trading company, and will strut about the village, not laying aside his beautiful waistcloth for even the roughest employments. A few hours afterwards it is soiled and torn ; but no matter, for even though the pleasure has lasted but a moment he has made himself conspicuous, and his vanity is satisfied.

The Negro is weakly lavish when he has an abundance, for he feels a childish conceit in showering gifts upon his new-found friends. I once knew a man named Mululu, who had at one time been a slave of the Bobangi. He had gained his freedom by his wit, had become a person of importance among his former masters, and had indeed amassed a veritable fortune, thanks to his commercial talents. In a very short time he squandered everything in gambling or making lavish presents, and then went back to work. The Negro's great delight is to have lived like a lord for a moment. "The future does not belong to us," he argues.

## CHAPTER VIII

### MERRIMENT

THE Negro is neither merry, nor sprightly, nor yet humorous, but is rather inclined to melancholy, and, indeed, his material cares leave him no time for gaiety.

The man of the forests has a gloomy and morose disposition. He laughs little, for the prison of vegetation in which he lives wraps his mind in darkness. The man of the plains is more animated, but rarely attains communicative merriment or exuberant gaiety ; while even in the ardour of games and dancing he has a certain tinge of apathetic melancholy. I shall speak of the dance later on ; but I wish to note here, as a psychological trait, the odd contrast exhibited between its wild motions and lascivious gestures and the imperturbable gravity on the faces of the dancers. It is a frigid orgy, in which the performers do not seem as though they were dancing for their own amusement in the very least.

Their diversions sometimes show a sort of unhealthy nervousness. The women gather in small groups, humming a plaintive melody, and soon begin to weep bitter tears. If one asks the cause of their grief, they reply that they have no reason for sorrow, but that they are weeping to amuse themselves.

The riverain inhabitants of the Upper Ubangi<sup>1</sup> and one small tribe on the Upper Sanga<sup>2</sup> are the only

<sup>1</sup> The Banziris, Burakas, Sangos, and Yakomas.

<sup>2</sup> The Pandes, who may be near relatives of the former.

Natives of my acquaintance who have a frankly merry disposition. They sing for whole days at a time, and are full of pranks, puns, tricks, and frolics. They know little social games, as, for instance, the one who sees the first star in the sky at nightfall calls out, "*Mapolo!*" and his companion must pay him a forfeit. They are also fond of hoaxes. A young Buraka, who was a member of my household, took a notion to call out, "*Ke-ku!*" in the shrillest tone twenty times a day, following it up with a sonorous *ke-ku-ke* in a lower key. It meant nothing, but my black Gavroche was delighted at the irritation which this practical joke produced in his fellow-servants.

## CHAPTER IX

### NEGRO INTELLIGENCE

#### I. ITS DEVELOPMENT.

THERE are two quite distinct stages in the Negro's intellectual life.

As a child he is pleasing, agreeable and engaging, quick and docile. He proves very precocious—certainly more so than the great majority of little European children. He grasps and assimilates without effort everything that is shown him. He is active, and so little averse to work that his elders even take advantage of his willingness and lay the burden of their tasks upon him. But from the time that he reaches puberty a radical change takes place. His development is suddenly arrested ; we may even say that it slightly retrogrades.

A comparison between the Negro's intellectual development and that of the European is very interesting. In order to make it clearer I have represented both (Fig. 1) by two curves with one and the same system of axes and co-ordinates ; the ages are carried out as abscissas, and the ordinates represent the intellectual development, as though it were possible to give it a numerical value.

The Negro's intellectual progress during the first ten or twelve years is rapid ; after that it slackens, becomes stationary, then slowly decreases during about fifteen years, and finally swift decay supervenes.

With regard to the European, matters proceed less

simply. In the course of this investigation we have been able to observe that many a psychological trait is not peculiar to the African Black, and that a goodly number of civilized persons might claim a share of the Negro's nature as their own. It would, in fact, be impossible to divide the two races into two psychological species which should be absolutely distinct and clearly defined, for everything which is essential in ourselves we recognize in the Negro, at least potentially, though in different proportions and differently arranged. But it is important not to lose sight of the

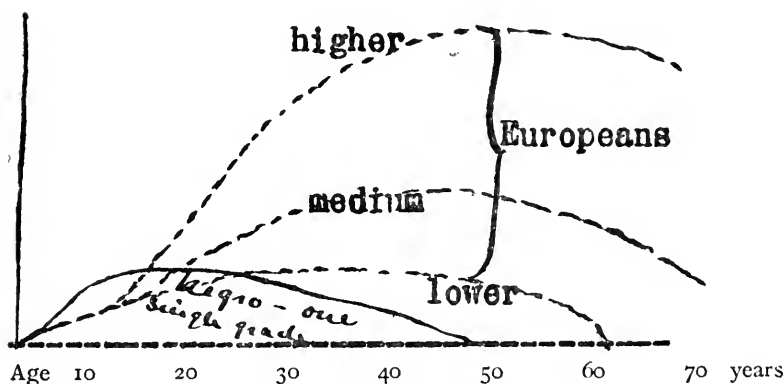


FIG. 1.—Comparative Development of Intelligence in the Negro and the European.

fundamental characteristic of each of the two races. By this I mean to say that the Negro mind is one and the same in the entire race, while that of the White Man is essentially various. One Negro differs very little, psychologically speaking, from another Negro, and the difference is infinitely small between each individual member of society and the general average. Civilized man, on the contrary, embraces the whole gamut, from the sublime to the abject. Among us there are people who are much more stupid or vicious than any African Native; but, to make

amends, we have gifted and virtuous men whose like Africa never furnishes. The savage is unmoral, with the candour of primitive Nature ; while civilized man has invented refinements in his depravity, debauchery, and crime. Again, the savage leads a monotonous life, which runs parallel, so to speak, with the earth from which he has but just sprung, while civilization counts some followers who grovel in the mire and others who, in the domains of intellect and morals, realize an ideal so lofty that the savage does not even suspect its existence. It is only of civilized beings that Pascal could say, "Man is at once the glory and the scum of the universe." Let me illustrate this important point by a comparison derived from kinematics. Taking humanity as a mass, I may say that its progress follows a single trajectory. At the centre of this mass, and parallel to one another, the members of the Negro group move in a compact body. In the case of the civilized group, on the contrary, there are internal forces which communicate extremely divergent notions to individual members, but, nevertheless, the centre of gravity of the mass continues to traverse its original trajectory. This is only a comparison, but it seems to show the facts fairly well ; for if certain civilized men describe an ascending curve, others describe a descending one, thus restoring the trajectory to an average which is doubtless not appreciably different from that of the Negroes. This brings us back to the comparative development of the intellect in the African and the European.

At the beginning of his life the European undergoes transformations which are slower and better graduated than those of his Black rival. Although the curve of his mental activity may vary with the intellectual predispositions of individuals, it usually acquires a broader and more extensive amplitude from that very moment when the Negro's curve becomes stationary ; and it does not commence to diminish



until after the lapse of a period which is at least half again as long as in the case of his lesser brother.

From what has gone before, let us, then, remember that after the Native reaches the age of twelve or fifteen his faculties, which are at first fairly quick, grow blunted and dull, his understanding becomes sluggish, he withdraws into himself, the childishness of his primitive nature crystallizes, and henceforth he will never exceed the height to which the swift progress of his early days has carried him. Even a Negro who has received a European education preserves only a veneer of it—a purely external embellishment, which covers up the hidden texture of his rudimentary soul, but does not exert any influence upon it. This borrowed dress does but mask instincts which have been inherited from a long line of savages, and which are ludicrously disguised beneath such incongruous and ill-fitting rags.

## 2. THE EFFECTS OF EDUCATION.

The Negro is assimilative, but he does not originate. He imitates like an actor who knows how to portray the virtues of a hero or the evil designs of a villain on the boards, though he may be a peaceful, honest citizen in private life. In that superposition of layers which modern psychology has revealed in the human mind, it is only the higher consciousness of the Negro which appears to be reached by external impressions and by education. The disturbance does not extend to subconsciousness, which alone forms the solid basis and the unchangeable foundation of human personality. In the African this subconscious stratum is, so to speak, excessively thin. This may be due to a lack of acquirements, either inherited or individual, or to the slight intuitive influence exerted by his environment. Eventually we shall see how certain moral and religious concepts are generated in the young citizen of the Negro

communities. What is of consequence to remember here is—if I may be permitted to use such figurative language—the specific lightness of the substructions of the Negro mind, as well as the small quantity and low quality of the facts, ideas, and moral principles which are impressed by consciousness upon subconsciousness. It is the solidity and strength of this moral substratum which makes men and their characters. To injure it is to throw the mind of the individual into confusion and to bring consternation upon society, for the strength of this deep-seated personality is needed in order to discipline the actions of the individual and to curb his passional reflexes. Without it the will is weak for both good and evil. The strength of character in the higher races and its weakness in primitive ones thus explain, on the one hand, the considerable divergences which we have already ascertained as existing in the intellectual and moral value of the different classes of Europeans, and, on the other hand, account for the almost entire sameness of Negro minds, since the Native character is unequal to the task of supplying individual divergences with a reagent powerful enough to magnify them in one way or the other. Here also is the key to the fickleness of the Negro's mental impressions and to the superficiality of his ideas, which can be altered and effaced all the more easily because they are less deeply rooted in the subsoil of his mind, and because they have encountered ground which is less well prepared for them, less fertile, and, in a manner, less tenacious, below the threshold of his consciousness. A Negro can be made a good joiner or mechanic, or even a good copyist. I have known some (and a mad thing, too!) who had been given a parrot-like acquaintance with the rudiments of Latin, algebra, and geometry. But of all such matters the Black Man learns only the routine. He remains a mechanical scholar. The ideas instilled into him remain sterile; for beneath his fleeting

memory and superficial understanding they do not find those subconscious but fertilizing elements which constitute genius and talent, or plain but real intelligence.

The Negro honestly admits the superiority of the White Race, and is eager to equal it. Vanity urges him on, and also, no doubt, that secret impulse towards improvement which rouses all mankind. He adds to this a modicum of unreasoning envy, for his ambitions aspire to pleasure without perceiving either the conditions which surround it or the price one pays for it. Not guessing the true source of our superiority, he fancies that he can attain it by merely imitating our dress, manners, and way of speaking. It is the invariable mistake of the unfit.

Many Europeans are victims of the same illusion with regard to the Negro, because they are not sufficiently convinced that the education of an individual can amount to nothing unless the race is educated too, and that, if racial advance is really possible through individual advance alone, we must at least grant the process a long time in which to perfect itself.

Others infer that the Black Race is not capable of improvement ; but this is an exaggeration in the opposite direction, and quite as unreasonable. As I have just been saying, the mentality of an individual, considered by itself alone, is a function of the mentality of his race at a given time. But one may presume, with some show of reason, that the race, like the individual, will undergo a progressive evolution, if the environment in which it is situated makes such progress a condition necessary for its preservation. This evolution, however, can take place only by natural means, and very slowly. Methods of coercion, by involving the normal action of the mental powers in confusion and incoherence, can result only in delaying their expansion, in causing their decay, and in bringing on the death of the race. Moreover, we must note that

progress generates progress, that the rate of progress accelerates with the flight of time, that it is a function of its own value, and that intellectual development thus follows a kind of geometrical progression.

Even in our day we know the disastrous effects which result from over-swift processes of Negro education, and which are clearly demonstrated by the Native's lack of adaptability to our ideas, the perversion of these ideas as they pass over into him, and the occasional derangement of his brain.

Our ideas, like our manners and customs, are the product of a different climate and of totally diverse social conditions. In Africa they are incongruous and unsuitable, as is shown by daily intercourse.

Children taught in the African schools learn reading, writing, and the rudiments of arithmetic. Some of them reach a fairly advanced stage of elementary education, and can be used as copyists. But the education which they receive is never of further use to them for their own improvement. They copy, but they do not revise, for they are simply machines. They do not read on their own account, nor do they strive to complete their education.

The only way in which the Negroes utilize the training that has been given them is in the writing of letters. This is an infatuation with them—a form of madness—in which their whole desire is to imitate the White Man. The addresses of their letters make a parade of pompous titles and resounding honorifics. The language is a ludicrous collection of bombastic expressions, of sonorous words used in a way not at all to the purpose, or in a wrong sense, and of forms of speech borrowed from the primary schools and flung at random into what they are writing. One man asks the Administrator for “a moment of verbal laconicism.” Another assures his chief of his “most perpendicular consideration.” The last man ends a letter to a friend in the following words: “Give my

greetings to my sisters and my mother and my father Am affected to learn of my brother's death, fiat ! ! ! ! ! ! ! !"

The first man, when sending ten francs to Madame Yesse, his wife, says to her : " Thus madame for the time being this is all I can send you you know yourself how long I have been here solace your heart with these ten francs that I am sending you. Also one thing you ought to know that my whole heart is yours I think you continually and you owe this news to yourself for self-respect is ahead of everything. Lately I told you not to spend too much time in the post-office. I don't care about it what is much better for you to do is to guard my house and especially take good care of it." A letter of complaint begins with these words : " I come prostrated before your high benevolence to beg you kindly to lend your ear to the following complaint." My last quotation is from the letter of a married man who went on board the *Pernambuco* for Ogowe, leaving his wife at Libreville : " The following evening we leave by the *Eclaireur* to ascend to Ogooue. That night, alone in the rear, seated upon a chair I thought of my father's country and my dear Izure and I sang her this song : Obambo Perlambuco, obambo Pernambuco, awe ya riguini mye . . . and this other : N'kumbe kenda go Mpongwe . . . ko buyinla mye Elisa nle, mi boguiza ye ngo mbolo . . . N'kombe kenda go Mpongwe, (*bis*) Rufin mbia yi mpongwe, yi tondo nde n'orema," etc., etc.<sup>1</sup> " Finally I have arrived now in good health, your warmth was almost too much for me, but it does not affect me in the least. . . ."

When put in possession of the means, conveniences

<sup>1</sup> It would bore the reader to reproduce this song *in extenso*, for it occupies no less than eighteen lines of the text. The very defective writing renders some of the passages excessively obscure. The general sense is : The sun goes to Gaboon ; may he carry to my dear Elisa a greeting of the heart, a greeting which comes from Rufin, good Rufin of Gaboon, who loves her with his heart, his whole heart, etc.

and resources which our civilization brought him, the Negro was naturally led to enlist them in the service of his innate defects. For my part I am quite inclined to an indulgent view. I consider that his corruption has been unconscious, and that he has but a very vague idea of good and evil, when dragged from his restricted environment and suddenly transported into the complexities of our morality and our manners, where he makes as many blunders as a countryman among the obstructions of Paris. Cases have also occurred in which our example, our teaching and our derision, by making him ashamed of his beliefs, have removed the moral restraints with which the latter furnished him, weak though they were, and have not had time to put anything in their place. Our ethical system is too elevated, too pure and too abstract for his intellect, and the result is an overthrow of equilibrium and a lack of counterpoise in his erring mind, which often relegate the Black Man who has been too quickly civilized to a moral level below that of the Central African savage. Our pupils add our vices to their own, without taking on any of our virtues. They pervert and wrest from their lofty meaning our soundest principles and our most excellent rules of conduct. Instances of this are numerous, for there are countless Natives who have been educated and trained—some of them in our best institutions in Paris—and whose first thought has been to make their skill serve them in breaches of trust and forgeries.

Such has been the effect of a generous, but blundering system of education upon these primitive men. Experience, alas ! has convinced no one ; for we have been satisfied to change their mere outward appearance. Yet the principles instilled could not have been more praiseworthy, and they, as well as our methods of instruction, are perfectly innocent of this unexpected result. Its cause lies in the fact that within these natures, so different from our own, there is a collision

of two irreconcilable groups of elements : on the one hand we have a nucleus of simple concepts, inherited and moulded among primitive and uncivilized surroundings ; on the other, an overwhelming mass of highly complex ideas which are the offspring of ancient and foreign civilizations. They are like those medicines which are salutary when separate, but which result in a dangerous poison when once they are combined.

### 3. NATURE OF NATIVE CONCEPTS.

Many people who are new to the psychology of exotic races have supposed that they could beguile the Negro by the display of our industrial products ; but they have been disappointed at meeting with nothing but his indifference or puerile curiosity. They fancy that they are paying off scores by accusing the subjects of their experiments of stupidity ; but in reality the human mind perceives and values only that which has a relationship very closely approaching identity with the aggregate of concepts which that mind has previously acquired. I may say in parenthesis, and in order to establish a connection with a point which has been conceded before, that this explains why all acquirements and mutations are extremely slow, since any contact with a new object adds but an infinitely small fraction of its total value to the mental possessions which already exist. This also implies the consequence which we have noted before : that the rate of progress is more rapid according to the greater extent of the concepts which have previously been acquired. Now the Native, with his slender stock of primitive ideas, is impressed only by the concrete portion of a matter whose true nature escapes him. If you desire that he should understand you, do not overstep the narrow circle of his comprehension. I will not say that it is entirely possible, but at least it is less difficult for you to confine yourself to these limits than for him to exceed them. He is

vanquished by the brute force which is his god. If it is necessary he will enjoy the conveniences of a new object. The report of a gun inspires him with fear and the penetration of a projectile causes him to entertain the idea of a formidable power. A steam-engine appears to offer him something which is manifestly superior to his own methods of labour. But he accepts these wonders just as they are and in their entirety, much in the same way that we see our children indifferently profiting by inventions the discovery of which has amazed their elders. The ingenuity required for the construction of our machinery is either a closed book to the Negro, or else he adopts explanations which harmonize with his surroundings and his daily necessities. Thus certain tribes of the interior believed that the boilers of steamboats were the pots in which the Europeans' food simmered ; and these good folk had not enough expressions of admiration with which to describe our enviable appetites, whose satisfaction required the constant labour of several men in stoking the furnace with wood. When immediate, positive, and material utility does not display its coarse-writ evidence to the simple mind of the Negro, he gives up attempting to understand. "That is the White Man's business" is all he says.

#### 4. STATISTICAL ACCOUNT OF THE NEGRO'S IDEAS.

The Negro's intellectual sphere is very restricted and is almost entirely confined to the material world. Its extent may be estimated by making a rough calculation of the number of words contained in the vocabularies of the various languages.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In making this estimate I have consulted the following works : R. P. Le Berre, "Dictionnaire Mpongwé-Français" ; R. P. Lejeune, "Dictionnaire de la langue Fang" ; Mgr. Carrie, "Dictionnaire de la langue Fiote" ; R. Bentley, "Dictionary and Grammar of the Kongo Language" ; Dr. Sims, "Kiteke Vocabulary" ; Dr. Schweinfurth, "Linguistische Ergebnisse einer Reise nach Central Africa," an extract



A few preliminary remarks are necessary. In the first place, the coast-languages are much richer than are those of the interior. Secondly, my vocabularies are collections of words rather than dictionaries, and consequently cannot pass for complete. I might say that the dictionaries resulting from the patient labour of Catholic and Protestant missionaries have the opposite defect. As a matter of fact, the chief aim of these pioneers of Christianity has been to popularize European ideas by explaining them in the native languages. They have succeeded either by adaptations—which have not always been particularly happy—of pre-existing words in those dialects, or by the transfer of more or less distorted expressions borrowed from European languages.

The most complete vocabularies comprise about five thousand words, but these must not be taken as representing an equal number of separate ideas. In fact, simple grammatical expedients develop around one central idea a whole pleiad of derivatives, which differ from the first word only as verb from noun, adjective, or adverb. Counting only derivatives by affix as separate ideas, we may estimate the entire intellectual possessions of the most advanced Negroes of Equatorial Africa as consisting of not more than two thousand five hundred or three thousand ideas at the outside. This is barely a tenth of the words in the French language, and this number must be considerably reduced in regard to the languages of the interior.

## 5. ABSTRACT IDEAS AND GENERALIZATIONS.

The immense majority of words in the Negro languages, as I have already remarked, express concrete ideas, such as objects, actions, movements, and sensations. Here there is no difficulty, for every percept has from the *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, 1872. Also my own collections on the preceding languages, in addition to the Mobangi, Banziri, Yakoma, and Zande.

its equivalent in the form of a separate word. When an idea is suggested by an external impression, the necessity of expressing it by a particular utterance of the voice is felt only in case one has a personal interest in communicating it to one's fellow-man. At the exceedingly low stage of culture in which the African Native is at present, this interest never extends beyond the operations of his organic functions. Thought begins to soar and to demand the manufacture of new words when social conditions and the development of industry have rendered life more peaceful and the needs of the body less imperious. It is then that curiosity awakens in regard to more speculative matters. The Negro barely touches this boundary line, and though it is true that he understands how to distinguish the orders, families, genera, and species of animate objects, this is an elementary operation on the whole, which even an animal can perform. Must we really look upon it as a process of generalization? Is it not rather a mere instinctive classification from a purely subjective point of view? For instance, every tree, of no matter what species, affords analogous advantages or disadvantages—advantages in the building of huts and keeping up of fires, and such disadvantages as the obstruction which it puts in the way of walking and cultivating the ground ; and in the same way every animal is hunter or hunted from man's standpoint. Accordingly, the human intellect, considering Nature in relation to man himself, at first differentiates surrounding objects only as beneficial or hurtful. Later it perceives differences and degrees in these classes—sees that those beings which it had at first deemed simple are complex, from the standpoint of providing it with various kinds of sensations. Certain similarities between words in the Negro dialects would seem to confirm this hypothesis. For instance, in many languages the same word designates "tree," "stick," "perch," "post," etc., while another means "animal," "beast," "meat," and "flesh." Again,



*Plate V.*

THE MAYOMBE FOREST.

To face page 82.



and from the same subjective point of view, the human being, generally considered, *ἄνθρωπος*, "homo," "Mensch," or "Weib," is frequently differentiated from man or woman, specially connoting a noble creature, or a being of a particular sex: *ἀνήρ*, *γυνή*, "vir," "Mann," or "Frau." Another detail which supports this argument is the bestowal of different names upon the sensation of heat, as it is due to the sun, or a fire-place, or a body with a high temperature. Analogous distinctions are made in the sensation of light, according to the source from which it emanates.

It is very noteworthy that these languages have no word corresponding to the general idea of "to be conscious of," "to feel." There are, however, special words for "to see" and "to hear," and these words are more or less indifferently made to express the meaning of "to feel." Hence they say: "to see or hear cold, heat, or pain." They have suitable words for expressing taste, smell, touch, tickling, etc.

But the inadequacy of their vocabulary in the matter of colours seems to us a strange anomaly. Most Bantu languages have only the words which correspond to white, black, and red. What is more, one would say that the African does not see colours as we do; for if, in place of asking him what an object's colour is, one asks him to compare it with that of another, he does so in conformity with the above nomenclature. He compares a cluster of dark green leaves and a piece of Guinea-cloth with a black suit of clothes, and a yellow flower with a piece of white linen; but this is certainly not the effect of a physiological peculiarity. By skilful questioning one ends by persuading oneself that even for the Native there is no identity in such a comparison, but that, like persons who confuse timbre and pitch in a musical sound, the Negro puts all colours into two classes—the light and the dark. Red seems to him to deserve a special place, doubtless because of its brilliancy. Tropical Nature favours this confusion, for,

contrary to the notion which is generally entertained in Europe about the colour-scheme of these exotic regions, the general tones of the landscape are green, sienna earth, and dull grey, while the sky is a dazzling white. Yellow and blue are very rare, and though white and red flowers are common, little notice is taken of them by the inhabitants, to whom they are of no practical use. The predominant sensation is the harsh contrast between the darkness of night and the dazzling light of day—between the gloom of the undergrowth and the snowy lustre of the glossy leaves in the sunlight. It is not probable that any variety of colours was imported into Tropical Africa until European goods made their appearance. Hence the poverty of the Native's palette.

It is also interesting to remark by the way that names of liquids are invariably in the plural.

The Negro does not distinguish clearly between certain physical properties of matter, such as hardness, resistance, etc., and the reaction which they demand of him. He is apt to say that an object which resists him is "strong," and he sometimes says this even when his language is rich enough to furnish him with the proper word. Moreover, even when these properties are designated by a special term, they have doubtless never been considered abstractly, apart from the object in which they appear, or rather from the subject who perceives them. Never has any one taken it into his head to consider weight, colour, or elasticity *per se*.

From all the preceding we are forced to conclude that the Negro's capacity for analysis, on the one hand, and his power of abstract thought, on the other, are extremely limited; and yet we may assert that he possesses a numerative structure which is fairly complete in both system and compass, for the most advanced tribes, especially such as have taken to trade, can count up to a thousand or even ten thousand.

The decimal system is in general use; but the Zande or Nyamnyam language, which is now decimal like

the rest, preserves traces of a quinary system, forming the second half-decad of the first ten numbers by adding a prefix to the names of the first.

The Negro has little talent for calculation. If one buys fifteen cakes of manioc-paste at five brass rods each, the merchant is incapable of calculating at a moment's notice that seventy-five brass rods are due to him ; and one must put the fifteen cakes of manioc-paste in a row and place opposite each the five brass rods which are the price of each unit. In some districts I have seen porters and baskets of grain, etc., represented by little sticks tied together in hundreds for the settlement of accounts. In the French schools the children have great difficulty in learning the simplest arithmetical operations. Beyond three figures they cannot add, and subtraction is still more difficult ; while multiplication and, above all, division are almost impossible.

#### 6. DISCRIMINATION—LOGIC.

Language must serve me once more as a criterion for estimating the Black Man's power of discrimination, which is apparently a much neglected faculty, as Negro grammar does not admit of any special procedure for instituting a comparison between qualities which are common to two objects, or at any rate the procedures which it does employ are extremely defective. In order to express the idea that Mayaka is stronger than Ngandu, one is obliged to use one of the following forms : " Mayaka and Ngandu, Mayaka is strong," or else, " Mayaka is strong, Ngandu is not strong." In the coast-languages, one sometimes says : " Strength, Azize surpasses Ogula." It seems reasonable to infer that if the resources of the language are so limited in regard to comparisons, it is because the mind which created these rudimentary forms is itself restive under this sort of operation, and is satisfied with rough

approximations in the mutual relations of things. Hence we may conclude that the power of discrimination, whose essential tool is comparison, is exceedingly limited.

Another feature in which all Negro languages share is lack of precision. For this there are many reasons, of which we may mention only the varied and sometimes very dissimilar meanings of one and the same word, the special poverty of the vocabulary in abstract terms, the lack of shades of difference grouped around one main idea, the excessively small number of prepositions and conjunctions and their vague signification, and the undue simplicity and laxity of the rules of syntax. All these reflect the confusion and semi-obscurity which hold sway in the Natives' primitive minds.



## CHAPTER X

### THE ÆSTHETIC SENSE

THERE is very little to be said of æsthetic feeling among the black races of Tropical Africa, for, as we have seen, they are not yet sufficiently detached from the material cares of a savage life to have acquired those two most important bases of art, imagination and ideality.

They have no written literature, because writing is unknown. The Fans are the only tribe of my acquaintance who possess a spoken literature, in the form of traditions, legends, fables, and tales, which have been orally transmitted from generation to generation. The value of these selections lies entirely in their subject-matter, for their style disregards artistic expression.

Drawing is almost unknown. But it is interesting to note that the Negro perfectly understands any engravings or photographs which one shows him. His amazement is excited by the inverted lifelike reflection in the finder of a camera, and accordingly the quite conventional significance of such figures on a flat surface is not lost upon him, though they have no value for him except as objects of curiosity. Beyond this he is not interested in them, and does not attempt to make others like them. He shows no leanings toward this whatever.

His attempts at painting are limited to red, white, and black daubs on musical instruments, the posts of huts, stools, and beds ; and even of these examples are rare. His subjects for decoration are geometrical

figures, such as squares or triangles, with few curves, or none at all.

Sculpture is in greater repute, and is employed upon wood, copper, iron, and ivory, of which the Natives make statuettes, seats, knife-handles, bracelets, necklaces, hairpins, etc. The most remarkable productions of this kind are certainly the legs of Misanga beds. All the work is unsymmetrical, misshapen, and often indecent. The heads of the figures are enormous, their limbs ludicrously thin, and their features sketchy and weak. These rough attempts are not superior to the examples which are found in prehistoric deposits, and the only conclusion which we can draw from them in regard to the Negro's mental assets is that he has an evident desire to give his ordinary implements a little more pleasing and attractive form, even by caricaturing beauty, if he can do no better.

Music is the glory of Negro art, and no matter how rudimentary it may be in both melody and harmony, we cannot help occasionally finding a certain pleasure in it.



Native methods of producing sonorous sounds do not amount to much. In his hours of reverie and *dolce far niente* a man who is fond of music will drum for hours together upon a stretched skin or even a plain packing-case, and it is still easier to satisfy his sense of rhythm, for there are individuals who are thrown into ecstasies

by continually scraping two splinters of wood across a primitive instrument, one end of which rests against the performer's chest and the other on an empty box.

**Allegro** ♩ = 100

*Zande Chorus*

Solo      Chorus      Solo      Chorus

0..... 0..... 0..... 0.....

...0... 0 0..... 0..... 0..... 7/4

mi . o ta Ba-ya . mgwa,      Zé . mi . o ta Ba-ya .

mgwa ngin . do ta sandu ta Bil' o      0..... o!

Repeat      End

Stringed instruments are more developed. They are of very different shapes and are tuned to any pitch the performer likes.

All<sup>to</sup> Recitative, almost spoken ♩ = 108

*Song of the Bangala Paddlers*

I . kè . rè kè tè      Ngan ga bu . k'è

Mundè . lè Ntan . gu      Ya mu . so . lo min . gi

Shouted

Hû!      Yôm . bè      Sa . ki . ri . ki tôm . bo .

Wind instruments are unknown in the Congo Basin. Flutes made of reeds and ivory trumpets are found north of the fourth degree north latitude, but these are Sudanese importations.

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All these instruments, except drums, are played solo, or very rarely in duet. They almost never accompany the voice, and never mark time for dancing, since their notes are too thin to dominate the noise of the footsteps. Their rôle is limited to the rendition of a little motif of five or six notes, repeated any number of times. The performer's repertoire is confined to one tune, and when that is finished he gropingly invents another as simple as its predecessor.

**Allegro** ♩ = 116

*Song of the  
Banziri  
Paddlers*

Ban . ga ti . ti Pa . ra bya . ni, Ban .  
 . ga ti . ti Pa . ra bya . ni è . là . là  
 yo è . là . là yo yo è . là . là  
 yo yo è . là . là yo

Their songs are often pleasing to the ear, when heard for the first time ; but they consist of only one phrase,

**All<sup>to</sup>** ♩ = 104

*Mobangi  
Air*

which is usually very short, and whose constant repetition quickly wearies and then exasperates one.

A piece of music is accompanied by the continuous beating of a drum, and its rhythm is marked by clapping the hands either against one another or against the chest. The words are insignificant and completely lack-



ing in poetry. They are interspersed with a number of ritornelli, like our "tra-la-la."<sup>1</sup> Their tonality is fairly similar to our own.



But no matter how conscientious our musical notation is, it cannot describe their music exactly. When we attempt to sing their melodies we cannot avoid adapting them slightly to our scale, modes, and tonality, even though we may reproduce them so that they are very,

<sup>1</sup> The following is the general meaning of the songs which I have given as examples. The Zande chorus: "Zemio tells Bayamgwa to give the Biris the boxes to carry." Song of the Bangala Paddlers: "Hasten, the Doctor and the European-Sun [nickname of a Dutch merchant] have many goods." Song of the Banziri Paddlers: "The seashore of the French is good." Bakongo dance: "The Commander is not generous." Mobangi dance: "The slave says that he wishes to sleep."

Pronounce *u* like *oo* in *tool*, *a*, *o*, *u* like the French sounds *an*, *on*, *un*; *g* hard; *s* sibilant; *w* like English *w*; *y* like a semi-consonant.

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easily recognized and may even win the approval of Native connoisseurs.

All<sup>to</sup> ♩ = 80

*Ritornello  
of the Yakoma  
Paddlers*

Lè yo lè yo!

Lè yo lè yo! Lè yo lè yo! yo!

When singing alone the Negro is fond of a very high falsetto, and our chest voices, especially the baritone and the bass, excite his mirth and derision ; but in choral singing he descends to a more normal pitch.

♩ = 63 *tranquillo*

*Mobangi  
Dance*

Soprani E ngô. ndo ya lo.ba ko.la

Bassi la la

Hand-clapping E ngô. la

He possesses the rudiments of harmony. The sopranos always carry the air. The low voices sometimes alternate with the sopranos, sometimes reinforce them at the octave, and sometimes, especially on the final note, accompany them at the fifth or the third, or both together, as a perfect chord.

This general survey of Negro psychology is of course not complete ; but it will nevertheless enable us to

approach the study of sociology among the primitive tribes of Africa to some advantage, and will, I hope, help the reader to understand whence the latter has sprung. Moreover, it is inseparable from the sociology of the subject, for they are two co-operating parts of the same whole, and in the following pages we shall find more than one detail which we might just as well have given a place in the psychology of the individual as in that of the mass.





**BOOK III**  
**SOCIETY**



## PART FIRST

### *THE FAMILY*

#### A DEFINITION OF THE NEGRO FAMILY— ITS CHARACTER

AS soon as two human beings cease living alone and unite for their mutual advantage they form a social group. The most natural group and the first in the normal order of things arises from the temporary or permanent association of two individuals of opposite sexes. Such a temporary association is explained and justified by the sexual instinct alone ; but though it is theoretically the source of the permanent association, it is only the latter which, strictly speaking, deserves the name of “social group,” for it alone possesses the quality of stability, which is the necessary and exclusive condition for the existence of every being, whether simple or complex. Now the sexual instinct is satisfied by a temporary association, or a succession of such, and hence, in order that man should abdicate his independence and be tied down to a permanent association, or at least a stable one, there was need of some new motive, which should be strong enough for the purpose. The nature of the incentive which led to this change will, I think, appear from what follows ; but just here we may say that this first step inaugurates division of labour and a mutual endeavour to benefit the couple and their descendants ; though at the same

time it also exhibits the entire subordination of women and children to the egoism of the male.

The bi-sexual couple is thus, in a way, the embryonic cell of society, and like it is capable of aggregation and differentiation. But among the tribes whom I am studying here, we seldom encounter this organism in its rudimentary simplicity ; for beside its natural growth, which is due to the birth of children, the original couple soon associates with itself new female elements, and members which it obtains by artificial means.

It is under this aspect, which is already complex, that I propose to study what I shall call the "Negro family" for lack of a better term. It is now apparent that we shall not find any resemblance in it to the European definition of family, as writers usually give it. It is not at all "an association of persons who are blood-relations and live under one roof," nor is it "a group of persons who are united by ties of relationship or matrimonial alliance," nor yet "a partnership arising from sexual desire." We shall also see that in the case which we are studying it is incorrect to say that "the authority of the husband and father is based upon love."

In our civilized society the concept of "family" is rounded out with more or less perfection by a moral element, consisting of an ideal, which may or may not be practically realized, but which includes mutual affection, happiness, and domestic bliss, as well as the aggregate of common responsibilities, cares, and attentions which religion first and then the law have always required persons to promise when about to contract matrimony. Moreover, if the man has been accorded certain authority in these associations of ours, the woman on her side has rights and privileges which the husband is bound to respect.

In primitive society one must not seek for anything like this, for everything is there subordinated to the

egoism of the male, and woman is in the background. The family is organized by man and for man, and does not permit of the slightest sentiment, but is absolutely economic in character. When a young man has accumulated commodities enough he buys a wife,<sup>1</sup> thereby exchanging certain perishable articles for property which is essentially personal, but surely less fragile and destructible than they, and very productive. He thus makes a good investment, whose income he receives in many different ways. Not to mention her minor cares, such as cooking and housekeeping, it is the woman who cultivates the plantations, who prepares or manufactures smoked fish, mats, basketwork, rubber, earthenware, waist-cloths, camwood powder, palm oil, and the different alimentary pastes, the greater part of which, not being required for domestic consumption, are carried to market and sold by her for her husband's benefit. Regulated adultery also brings in a good revenue ; and lastly there are the children, whose real father matters little. The boys become labourers and increase the respectability and external influence of the head of the family, while the girls can be sold for a large quantity of commodities, as was their mother before them. Thanks to these financial transactions, the husband finds himself in a position to buy a second wife and then a third one, if he likes, and afterwards both male and female slaves ; and finally he becomes a rich, influential, and powerful individual, who occupies a predominant position in his tribe.

Accordingly, there is nothing sentimental about this union. Even the satisfaction of the man's sexual desires does not constitute its most prominent motive, since before he had acquired a wife for his sole use he did not lack this. The exclusive possession of his wives

<sup>1</sup> Cf. with the Mohar of the Hebrews (Deut. xxv. 5, 6) and the Saduka of the Moslems (Koran iv. 3).

troubles him little enough, nor does the legitimacy of his offspring concern him. In the end his language, and perhaps his thought, almost confuses the super-added or adopted members of his family with his descendants who are natural, if not legitimate.

All this clearly shows the profound difference between the family as we understand it and the domestic group of the Negro. At the base of each lie the vital necessities of both the individual and the race. In our case, after an enormously long evolutionary period, these are now somewhat concealed by our mild ways and by the preponderance which intellect and feeling have slowly gained over mere brute materiality ; but the African is entirely engrossed in a relentless anxiety about them. It is not a commonplace figure of speech, but a fact, to say that the Negro lives and crawls upon the earth, that he sleeps, works, and eats on the ground, and that he is usually soiled with dust and mud ; while civilized man has a tendency literally to uplift all the manifestations of his life, hiding behind a mask of religious and moral principles the selfishness which induces both society and its members to set the family upon a firm foundation.

The Congo Native artlessly parades this motive of personal advantage. The existence and the preservation of his family group are dependent, first, on the benefits which it bestows upon the man, who finds in it the satisfaction of his desires, as well as repose, and many other material and moral advantages ; in the second place, on those it bestows upon the woman, who in this partnership finds an indispensable support for her natural weakness and physical infirmities ; thirdly, on those it bestows upon the children, to whom family life guarantees support and protection, at least until they are grown ; and in the fourth place, on those it bestows upon the superadded members, such as adopted persons, clients, and slaves, who shelter their weakness and poverty and the miseries of their exile

under the authority of a wealthy and influential protector.

We shall now trace the entire evolution of the Negro family from its foundation to its dissolution, and then we shall study the respective positions of each of its members.

## CHAPTER I

# THE EVOLUTION OF THE NEGRO FAMILY

### I. THE FOUNDATION OF THE FAMILY.

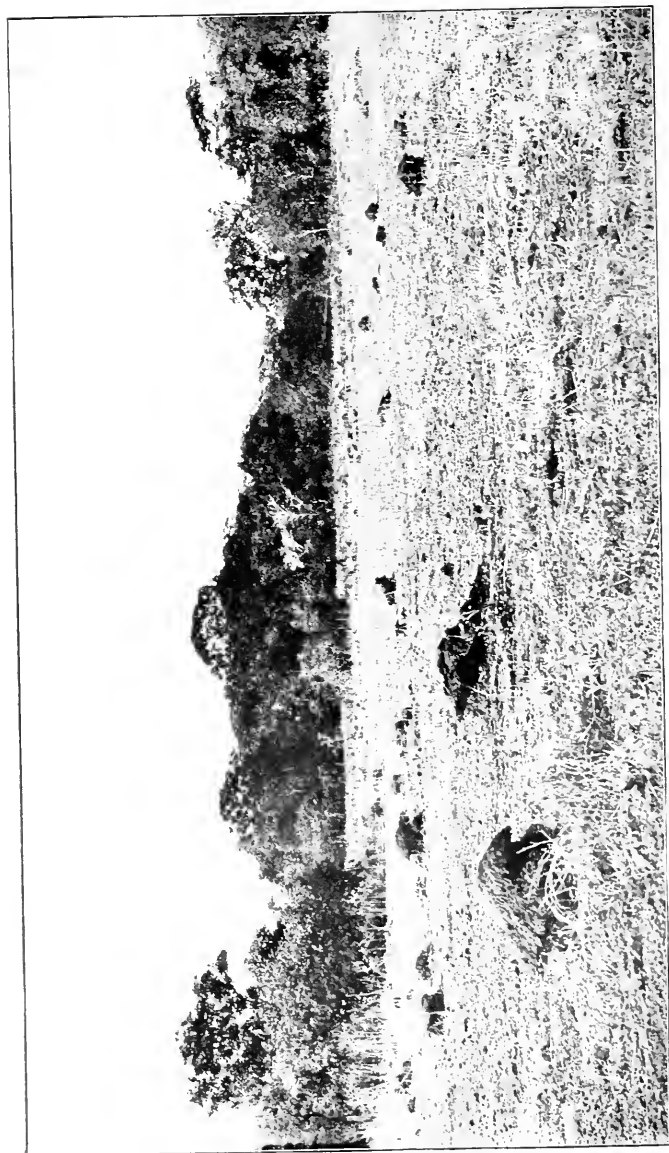
I CANNOT say that the Negro family is based upon marriage, for the word "marriage" presupposes some sort of a consecration in the name of a higher principle, which may be either God or the law. By striking the imagination with the solemnity of its accompanying ceremonies, and by assuming every appearance of a religious act, the contract which is entered into upon this occasion lends the union that character of indissolubility, or at least of permanence, which, as I have said before, is necessary for the firmness of the social structure. The various families are like so many stones, to whose close fitting are due the harmony and noble proportions of the whole edifice.

Now among the African tribes the family group is itself the entire structure. It does not unite with others, and hence does not need the assistance of a solemn contract to form a sort of cement, which would be devoid of both utility and sanction in this case.

No ritual consecrates the marital bond, nor does any mystic interpretation accompany the material fact, which is both a social and a physiological phenomenon. Marriage is a matter of purchase and sale—nothing more. A man buys a wife from her father and the family is founded. The man may have made a good bargain and the woman is resigned, for to be a mother







A PLATEAU ON THE UPPER MBOMU.

*Plate VI.*

To face page 103.

is her natural function, and to be a good housewife is her duty. Her thoughts do not stray beyond these limits, which are doubtless narrow, but which are certainly essential to the world's progress.

From the preceding there appears at once another characteristic. In making marriage a contract, witnessed by an oath in the name of a Higher Power, our religions and laws imply the free consent of the contracting parties, who, in the presence of all their friends, declare their intention of founding a family. Now, where there is no freedom there is no validity, and on this rests the sanction of the fundamental idea that every individual, of no matter what sex and condition, is a moral agent, who is the master of his or her person, inclinations, and actions. Hence also there is an increased anxiety to unite the family more closely by striving to mate individuals only in accordance with their personal likings. We may remark by the way that the extent to which this law is observed, and the nature of the affinities which determine the majority of a nation's marriages, establish its moral standards.

The African family is not based upon a contract of free consent, for in the first place we know already that it holds its own as an independent organism by virtue of the bonds of mutual advantage which unite its natural or artificial members; and in the second place, since woman differs from man physically, and in part mentally, she has no right to an equality which would be in any way homologous, within the limits of her peculiar capacities.

In the midst of harsh and untamed Nature might is right and the strong man is lord absolute. This is a just and necessary principle, which the struggle for existence prescribes and the instinct of self-preservation demands. There was need of a lengthy evolution, a slow release from raw material, or, to use Plato's expression, a progressive ascent from the lower belly to the brain, before even a glimpse could be caught

of the social utility inherent in woman's quite intuitive and sentimental gifts beside the rational and practical realism of man. They are two poles which in nowise interfere, but are complementary of one another.

In Tropical Africa there is not yet the first notion of the part which female mentality plays. The Negro is at close grips with stern necessity and keen desire, and chivalry has not yet entered into him. Power is his god. He respects the one who possesses it, while the one who lacks it earns his scorn, and thus no one ever thinks of consulting a woman about the marriage which is intended for her. This matter lies between the would-be husband and the father of the young girl, who submits passively to the conditions of the bargain.

## 2. QUALITIES WHICH ARE REQUIRED IN THE CONTRACTING PARTIES.

Since marriage is a matter of purchase and sale, the question of the qualities which the contracting parties must possess connects itself with two others, viz. which of the two benefits by the alliance, and what is the nature of the benefit which is anticipated?

A woman reaps no more benefit from the choice of a husband than does a mare from being sold to one horse-dealer rather than to another, nor, indeed, is she consulted in the matter. It is her father and her family whom the choice concerns. They must consider whether the candidate offers a higher price than his competitors, and whether it consists of more attractive wares; whether his credit is good and his business abilities first-rate; whether he has a fluent tongue, and is, as we should say, a man of "good position," an "influential member of society." They must ask themselves if he can intrigue, if he has an insinuating address, if he already has a following, and if his village is well situated. These are advantages of the first rank for any one who is lucky enough to make such

a match, and these are what concern the young girl's family. Other things may be, and almost always are, disregarded. Very often there is not even any anxiety as to whether the suitor is able to beget offspring, and fine young girls are sold to infirm and impotent old men. This, however, by no means prevents the birth of children—under what reservations we shall see later.

The conditions are more severe in regard to the woman. The suitor of course dictates them, since he is the purchaser, and as such is anxious to buy upon the most advantageous terms an article which he expects will be a source of great profit to him. In marrying he looks for a good cook, a thrifty housewife, et cetera. These "et cetera" are much more complicated than one would fancy, and do not consist merely of a consort's favour and of an easy, indolent life in some quiet and comfortable home. The husband has many an ambitious dream of increasing his political influence, and of becoming a great chief, by means of his wife. She is expected to be able to give him all of these things, for in this embryonic society she represents the whole of Agriculture and almost the whole of the Arts and Manufactures. All the Department of the Interior devolves upon her, and lastly, in virtue of her natural functions, she is the maker of citizens, both male and female. Thus she is the architect of her husband's future prosperity; she is the essential and primordial basis of all Negro political economy, and from this we see at once what qualities are demanded of her.

In order to guarantee the head of the family a numerous offspring, the wife must have reached the age of puberty and must be prolific. This does not mean to imply that a match may not be contemplated and even concluded long before either party has become marriageable. They may be engaged and even married from the age of seven or eight, as occurs with special frequency among the Fans. The tribes on the Middle

Sanga are supposed to require virginity in the bride, and it is said that a marriage is not consummated before the twentieth menstrual period, or about a year and a half after the beginning of the courses. I suspect the truth of this statement, for the Negro is never very scrupulous in these matters. Indeed, the contrary is true, and among the majority of tribes preference is given the woman who has furnished manifest proofs of fruitfulness before marriage.

It seems certain that incest is everywhere expressly condemned—doubtless more from instinct than from a rational fear of racial deterioration. Among certain tribes, particularly the Fans, this aversion takes the form of a binding prohibition. In other places precaution is carried so far that marriage between inhabitants of the same village is avoided, for woman's virtue is so frail and unstable that a man would otherwise never be sure of not marrying his mother, sister, or daughter, and so it is considered more prudent to go fairly far afield in search of a wife. Nevertheless, a free wife can only be married in the midst of the tribe, because, as we have already seen, the Negro dislikes strangers—"barbarians," in the Roman sense of the word.

Marriage between connections is nowhere considered in the light of incest, and a son may very easily marry any of his father's wives except his own mother, or he may marry his brother's wives. In some districts custom even goes so far as to allow marriage between children by the same father but different mothers.<sup>1</sup>

The groom naturally values good reports on the docility and adaptability of the bride and the mildness of her disposition, although this is of secondary importance for one who may use means of coercion which

<sup>1</sup> Torday and Joyce: "The Bayaka" (*Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*), as analysed by the *Mouvement géographique*, 24<sup>e</sup> année, No. 17.

are capable of inculcating all the aforementioned virtues in the most rebellious spirit.

The age of the bride is of small consequence in itself, and has no influence save upon her price.

I own that I am greatly at a loss to characterize the Congo Native's ideal of plastic grace. I am inclined to doubt whether he forms an ideal of beauty, so greatly does the type which he prefers differ from our European standard, but I admit that this is not an adequate reason. I shall, however, attempt to sketch what used to be called some years ago a "composite portrait" of the Negro woman, as wife and mother, leaving to the reader full liberty of appreciating the æsthetic ideal of these tribes as his personal taste may incline him.

The suitor attaches no importance to what in our eyes constitutes feminine charm of all ages. He looks neither to grace, nor slenderness, nor an undulating gait, nor playfulness, nor refined and dainty ways. On the contrary, his taste is for a stout and buxom dame, who has a broad and flabby abdomen, a thick-set figure, features worn by toil and child-bearing, a muscular neck, breasts which have wide areolas and fall to the belly in folds that are sometimes wrinkled and sometimes inordinately swollen, fat buttocks, deeply hollowed loins, massive thighs, and feet ending in great toes which are turned in. Upon the whole, he wants a strong animal for work and the bearing of young, a big mare, which is good for draught purposes and for heavy loads, and is always in foal and giving suck. The breasts are a particular object of attention, for it is supposed that they indicate sterility when they are firm and upright. To avoid such a misfortune the young girl takes care to depress them very early by means of a cord tied tightly around the chest. In the depths of the African bush woman still believes that it is her place and her object in life to bring children into the world, to nourish and to rear them. It is a purely instinctive, natural virtue, which the perversion

of morals has caused almost to vanish in districts which have long been under European influence, and in which woman has ceased to be the mother in order to become an instrument of pleasure.

### 3. MARRIAGE NEGOTIATIONS.

In regard to Negro marriage it must be understood that the supply is less than the demand, for the groom-to-be or his family open negotiations with the future father-in-law in almost every case. I have already said that among the Fans the pair come together long before either of them is marriageable ; but they do so for diplomatic reasons—for affairs of State—just as much as in the most exalted of our European Courts, and because the families in both cases desire to arrange alliances and secure an outlet for their trade. In all other instances, in which the objects are doubtless lower, the families wait until they are of an age at which consummation can follow close upon the conclusion of the bargain.

To negotiate the purchase of a legitimate wife is no small undertaking. The discussions are not carried on in the retirement of strict privacy, for the Negro is incapable of keeping anything to himself, even where his most vital interests are concerned, and when he attempts reserve the abstracted air which he parades in order to give himself consequence betrays his inmost thoughts to every one. Accordingly the neighbourhood soon knows all about the proposed transaction, which furnishes the Native with a delightful opportunity of indulging his passion for idle talk and frivolous discussion, and tongues quickly begin to wag. Brothers take part, as well as uncles, village chiefs, neighbours, idlers, and third parties. Persons who are least concerned about the matter intermeddle, and often end by taking a more active share in it than if their own future were at stake. The suitor and the fathers of the contracting parties are outdistanced and submerged. The



whole question is confused, complicated, swamped in a flood of opinions, advice, and remonstrance. The two parties are swept away with the torrent, and can no longer recognize one another in the midst of the turmoil. The passive and suggestible nature peculiar to the Negro prevents the principals from taking the vigorous initiative of throwing all these busybodies out of doors and of adjusting the matter simply in their own families. Just the opposite happens, for the officious friends are reinforced by parasites, whom the suitor and his future father-in-law are in turn obliged to lodge, feed, and treat to drinks. The palm wine goes to their heads, voices are raised, and the wildest talk circulates amid a general uproar.

Nor can the business be settled in a day, for many sessions are needed to examine the reciprocal advantages of the proposed match, to discuss the price and to choose the wares of which the payment is to consist. The adversaries keep on the defensive, not venturing an observation, save with caution, and weighing every word. The slightest imprudent remark would have the direst effect in the midst of an assembly on the look out for the most trivial slip. Universal shouts at once greet a blunder. One must beware especially of simple-minded or ill-meaning friends who torment one with the treachery of such remarks as: "How is this, Orondo? Is that all you offer? Why, you have so and so, which you could very well add to what you are paying, without even feeling it. It's little enough for such a wife, and you are a lot richer than you give out." So the wretched suitor is caught in the trap, and must needs yield.

The price of a wife varies greatly according to district, and depends upon a woman's age and origin and her family's social standing. It ranges from four to twelve pounds sterling on the Lower Congo, while it may reach thirty-two or forty pounds among the Fans, in the neighbourhood of European factories.

Although there is no fixed or immutable standard for the articles composing the stock of goods which represent the purchase price of a wife, it will, nevertheless, be interesting to give several examples remarked here and there in different districts.

*In the Niari Valley.*—To the family : 10 loads of salt, 1 flint-lock, 1 keg of powder, 1 water-jug, 1 basin, 1 coverlet, 1 statue, 2 large hogs. To the father : 10 pieces of cloth and 1 hog. To the mother : 1 coverlet and 4 pieces of cloth.

*Among the Fans.*—100 assagais, 100 war-knives, 50 trade-knives, 10 mirrors, 30 small trade-boxes, 3 000 bars of iron, 50 flint-lock trade muskets, 50 casks of powder, 4 iron barrel hoops, 40 earthen jugs, 300 trade plates, 1 large canoe, 10 kids, 4 straw hats, 3 white trade greatcoats, 30 rolls of tobacco, 10 pieces of trade cloth, 12 bottles of gin, and 4 edible dogs.<sup>1</sup>

*On the Middle Sanga.*—200 midjokos (native money), 1 kid, 1 anvil, 1 hammer, 5 assagais, and 5 bead necklaces.

Among almost all tribes the suitor begins looking for a wife only when he has saved enough to pay for her, so that he is in a position to discharge his debt as soon as the bargain is concluded. The stock of goods is delivered to the father-in-law either in one lot or in instalments, sometimes when the wife is handed over, sometimes before, or after, according to custom ; but this is always a matter which involves the solvency and good faith of the parties.

The Fans, who decidedly hold a very special place in the great Congo family, have quite a different custom. The fair sex—which is, as we have seen, useful as well as ornamental—is quoted at so high a price that the wealthiest man in the country could not pay cash. We know already that betrothals are usually arranged at a very tender age. At that time a first payment is made either by the husband, should he be old enough to hold property, or by his relatives if he is still a minor ; and the fiancée then leaves her own people and enters her husband's family. Here she lives con-

<sup>1</sup> V. Largeau, *Encyclopédie pahouine*.

tinuously until she is of marriageable age, and here she is moulded in the customs and thoughts of her new home, assimilates its local traditions, and is broken in to the tastes and caprices of the future lord of her destiny. Meanwhile the groom's family continue to discharge the obligation in instalments, though of course they must be dunned, for the Fan is not fond of paying his debts. The creditor has great difficulty in collecting the price agreed upon, is obliged to extort it bit by bit, and even then is often unsuccessful, so that a struggle and ultimately a conflict may result. We shall recur to this sort of incident later ; but for the moment we may suppose that the debt has been paid in full. One would naturally imagine that the husband would now be free at last, and could enjoy the treasure so dearly bought. But such is not the case, for from now on the creditor shows bad faith, though by right he has no longer any interests in the matter.

The phase upon which we now enter is not peculiar to the Fans, but is shared by most of the Bantus. In his wife's relatives the wretched husband has fastened upon himself leeches whose voracity is insatiable. Her family develops more members than Abraham's, and makes incessant demands under such utterly fantastic pretexts as the first menstruation of the fiancée, the first conjugal cohabitation, the first evidence of pregnancy, confinement, and what not. The ingenuity displayed in this sort of rapacious mendicancy is truly extraordinary. "We have sold you our daughter," says the beggar (or it may be sister, niece, or cousin). "It is true that you paid the price agreed upon ; but admit that it was little enough for the treasure which we gave you. Could you have found a more productive wife anywhere? How strong she is for work ! And here she has just borne you another child, a girl, too ! You certainly owe me a small present on that account, and even then you will still be in our debt. She is

a priceless treasure, I can tell you ! ” To sum up, the poor devil is exploited in due form, and cannot escape under pain of a struggle or even armed hostility ; but he will take his compensation later on by retaliating upon his own sons-in-law.

We now perceive one of the most important secrets of the Congo Negro's financial policy, and we understand why the father of a family values the birth of female children so highly ; for the future gains and advantages which he discounts from this source tenderly affect his paternal love.

#### 4. POLYGAMY.

Since a wife is such a profitable investment, everything points to the advisability of taking at least as many consorts as one's means will permit, and polygamy thus becomes a reasonable and logical institution, under the guise of a sure means of increasing one's income. A wife is a piece of property which is durable ; she can move about independently, can look to her own safety, and, lastly, is capable of producing a large revenue. In a country where the theory of capital, income, and interest is not only unknown but unthinkable without foreign interference, a native can probably find nothing better in which to invest his money. The harem is a bank—a savings bank—and hence one will not be surprised to find that the number of an individual's wives is, *par excellence*, the measure of his wealth. Poor indeed is the man who cannot buy even one, while he who can distribute his favours among ten is a powerful capitalist, a multi-millionaire. Ten is a limit which is seldom exceeded ; and among the Fans, where wives are expensive, the maximum is never more than five. Even thirty years ago it was apparently only the very rich who could lift themselves one or two degrees above humiliating monogamy.

## 5. DISSOLUTION OF MARRIAGE.

From the particulars set forth in the section before the last it follows that Negro marriage opens a sort of running account between the husband and his wife's family. According to our European ideas, every connection between two parties to a contract is at an end as soon as they have exchanged the article in question for the sum total of the purchase price and have agreed to the transaction. Africans, however, are not of this opinion, at least in regard to the hymeneal contract, and, as we have already seen, even after full payment the bride's family never consider that they have quite lost their interest in the matter. Every pecuniary advantage conferred upon the new husband by his productive better-half seems to justify her relatives in demanding a share of the proceeds. Conversely, however, the husband claims the right to cancel the contract in case the article which he has received does not correspond to his legitimate expectations.

We shall now examine the most frequent instances of a breach.

The fault with which the wife is charged may be either moral or physical in its nature. Sometimes she has an ineradicable freak of character, such as a cross-grained temper, which will not yield to the most convincing arguments, or a bad disposition, which rebels against the whole arsenal of coercion. Perhaps she is a shrew and stirs up strife at every turn either in the village or among her companions in the harem, so that life becomes impossible with such a firebrand of discord, always burning and always starting conflagrations. In other cases the wife may be a good creature, but her education in domestic duties may have been greatly neglected, so that the plantations droop, the food is not fit to eat, the baskets are useless, the mats are badly woven, and the manioc is not properly washed, boiled, and kneaded. We hasten to

add that the Negro woman seldom deserves reproach for such faults as these. Desertion from the husband's village is the most serious offence, for this is a case of capital taking flight and purloining itself from its lawful owner.

According to the Native idea in general and the husband's susceptibility in particular, all such grievances imply the responsibility of the wife's family, for, inasmuch as the husband purchases an article with the object of personal satisfaction and material profit, the family, in selling him this article, are obliged to see that it is furnished with such qualities as may guarantee the realization of his expectations, and consequently it is their duty to bring their child up in a suitable manner.

The husband may make still more unreasonable demands, for his wife's manifest barrenness entitles him to seek a dissolution of the marriage. His own impotence can never be pleaded, since it is certain that he will not have lacked for coadjutors. Should the wife contract a serious chronic disease, which makes her useless and which does not yield to the best treatment of the local apothecary, she is the cause of pecuniary loss to her proprietor. We are constantly finding the same anxiety displayed in regard to this form of capital which is in danger of loss and is not bringing in a return. Here, again, the idea is that the wife's family should have provided their daughter with a robust constitution. The economic and financial character with which the wife is invested is further emphasized by the fact that if several successive pregnancies have had an unfortunate result, or if several successive children have died young, the husband again feels himself defrauded; for there are no more lads to enlarge his village and increase his influence, and no more girls whom he may sell in years to come for a quantity of valuable commodities.

In any case, the wife is a passive agent, and has

no concern with business matters, so that the injured husband's claim must be adjusted by her father and uncles. Manifestly, if the husband has paid too dear for a worthless article, the seller must either take it again and replace it with another which will be satisfactory or else pay back the purchase price. One may imagine that the proceedings are not particularly easy, and that they give rise to all sorts of petty tricks. The grievances of each side are discussed. If the justice of the quarrel is admitted, which is not very likely, the question as to the nature of the husband's compensation is then taken up. The relatives of the wife will hardly consent to receive a depreciated female, who would afterwards be almost impossible to dispose of ; while, on the other hand, it might be difficult for the husband to find another wife whose value would correspond exactly to the price paid for the first one. One party or the other is sure to be dissatisfied ; and if they cannot agree on a substitute, how are the commodities which were paid over to be given back? Long before this they have all been expended, distributed, worn out, or wasted.

On other occasions the husband is at fault, and the wretched wife runs weeping to her family to tell them her troubles. Her husband has beaten her unmercifully, she says ; a little beating she would not mind, but he is really too violent. Or perhaps the trouble is jealousy, that everlasting female grievance. The poor forlorn creature is defrauded of her husband's favours, which are enjoyed exclusively by another woman, a nasty slave, a foreigner—a Miss Nobody. The relatives, of course, arrange matters, for we must reflect that otherwise they would have to give back the goods previously paid over to them.

Matrimonial discord seldom ends in divorce. The prospect of the almost insuperable difficulties which surround it and the occasionally serious quarrels which it entails are doubtless not the least powerful counsellors

of moderation to fickle-minded married pairs, nor the least secure guarantee of domestic stability.

The one case in which the dissolution of the tie is irremediable is the death of man or wife.

The husband looks upon his wife's death as a grievous loss—I mean, of course, financially speaking. If this sad accident occurs within a fairly short period after the wedding, it constitutes one of the cases which we have just cited, and may call for compensation from the bride's relatives.

At the husband's death the widow shares the lot of all her late consort's other possessions, and is inherited quite as a matter of course by the lawful heir, who may be one of her brothers-in-law, or, in default of them, one of her sons-in-law.



## CHAPTER II

# THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MAN AND WIFE, AND THEIR RESPEC- TIVE POSITIONS

### 1. NATURAL TIES.

IN the preceding pages I hope that I may have succeeded in showing the pre-eminently economic nature of the family group among the Congo Natives. It should not surprise us that these embryonic social organisms have taken this direction, for the word "society," in all its meanings, implies the association of similar beings for a common end. Those complex organisms which we call civilized States show, in its highest development, the combined effort of their constituent members to attain the security and greatest welfare of the community. The domestic groups of the primitive Africans are actuated by the same necessities, and contain all the latent sources of the most complete social combinations. In the latter, however, division of labour has distributed and specialized the various functions of social physiology among more or less restricted collectivities or even simple individuals ; while among the African Negroes, where the nation is practically reduced to the bi-sexual couple, these two primordial elements of the domestic group carry on between them the whole of private and public business—which is very limited, of course. The man attends to the Foreign Office, Religion, the Home Office, Commerce, War, the

Navy, Finance, and Justice, while woman has the Departments of Public Works, Arts and Manufactures, Agriculture, and another Ministry which we have not yet thought of establishing in our midst, that of Repopulation, which is also, as we have seen, a public duty of an economic order.

The Negro domestic group—I emphasize this purposely—is in a way the miniature forerunner of an organized Government, in which the general anxiety concerning defence and economic welfare almost entirely stifles the purely emotional and moral features of the association. If it were not foreign to our subject, it would be interesting to study the development of family feeling as one of the aspects of the division of labour. By this I mean that when, in the course of history, union gave the primitive couple more and more confidence in the security and permanence of its existence, an increasingly large area was found to be free for more refined sensibility. But, however this may be, let us try to find out just how intimate and affectionate the man of the Congo and his wife are now, under the social and economic forces which dominate them. We are obliged to admit that if the torch of wedded love is not quite extinguished in them, it is at least not very bright, and we have already seen that marriage is a selfish business, with which preference has no concern. I have some reason to think that the transports of true passion almost always lie outside the sphere of married life, for the husband is lord and proprietor, while the wife is a useful chattel, the more properly physical nature of whose utility has not the faintest tinge of idealism, even from a sexual point of view.

Hence it follows that faithfulness between husband and wife is neither a sentimental nor a moral obligation. As it was in the Abbey of Thelema, the married pair do what they like, or at least what they can, for here, as is everywhere the case, liberty of the

individual is limited by the rights of others. The husband, who is never quite satisfied with the caresses of his wives or who is weary of their submissiveness, hopes for joys unknown outside the domestic mat, and goes gleaning in other men's fields. When the *Dulcinea* is merely an unmarried woman the greatest risk he runs is a jealous scene with his own wives. But when she is a neighbour's wife I tremble to think of the strife his criminal intrusion may arouse, unless he pays a decent indemnity to the injured spouse.

The wife's virtue is exposed to many perils, for the institution of polygamy and the high price of matrimony doom many young fellows to celibacy, and as a perfectly natural consequence they are obliged to seek the satisfaction of passions stimulated by the climate in some other way than through the regular purchase of a wife. As I have already said, this is not considered the slightest peccadillo in either sex. On the contrary, it is continence which seems abnormal to them. Hence it is no more wrong in theory for a woman who is under the authority of a husband to favour any one who pleases her than it is for a woman who is not yet properly married. But it must not be forgotten that woman is a possession, a form of property, a sort of capital, and that he who possesses her by due and lawful purchase has the sole right to make use of her. From these various considerations it follows that adultery is not a deviation from a moral principle, which is, moreover, unknown ; it is something more serious—a theft, a premeditated appropriation to the prejudice of the lawful owner. There is no objection to it at all if the consent of the husband is obtained, and especially if he is paid the exact price due to him for the loan of a valuable article. A well-bred Fan would consider that he was disregarding the laws of hospitality if he did not offer one of his wives to his guest ; but this courtesy has a selfish motive, and when the guest takes his departure next day he must

not forget to reward the civility of his *Amphitryon* by gifts, which cannot be too rich or numerous ; for he will else run the risk of being smartly reminded of the proper observance of Pawan etiquette.

Adultery which is committed without the husband's knowledge is everywhere punished according to the mildness or severity of each tribe's manners and customs. The wife who is convicted of indulging in it without having obtained the formal authorization of her lord and master renders herself liable to various mutilations, such as having her face, chest, and back slashed, or her ears slit. Her partner in crime sometimes risks his life, if he does not pacify the injured husband by payment of an adequate indemnity. Among the Zandes the rash individual who attempts the honour of a high chief renders himself liable to ear-cropping and castration ; nor is he allowed to buy himself off.

This peculiar conception of conjugal fidelity—or infidelity, if one prefers—does not prevent the gradual formation of a certain degree of intimacy between husband and wife. That this feeling is neither warm affection nor intense love must indeed be admitted ; but their lack is supplied by a resemblance of character and mutual confidence which are the result of habit and continuous association, and of the many days and nights passed side by side in the same narrow hut, the same filth and the same sickening, smoky atmosphere.

## 2. THE HUSBAND'S FUNCTIONS.

The part played by the husband in the family must now begin to take fairly definite shape in the reader's eyes. The father of the family has no share, at least directly, in the Department of the Interior—domestic labour—but is king and priest, and allows himself to be waited upon. Unfortunately, however, the profession of potentate has its own troubles, and one who would make a success of it needs skill and a political

instinct. In Tropical Africa it is not enough to be a fine, sturdy man, or to employ the most energetic measures of coercion with freedom and discretion, in order to be respected and obeyed as a husband. It is true that authority is enforced by reward and punishment in judicious succession ; but the employment of these measures is directed and limited by the end to be gained. In the particular case which is occupying our attention it must be kept well in mind that the principle of the domestic organism is essentially centripetal. Everything converges towards the comfort of the husband, who is a sybarite and requires a quiet, decent home—a very human feeling, by the way. Passive obedience will not make him perfectly happy, for he loves to see good-nature and devotion in the faces of those who surround him. He has a horror of domestic strife, and even one wife who is soured, angry, or complaining destroys all his peace. What would happen if the harem should join in a common spirit of rebellion? The unfortunate husband would be outnumbered and exposed to certain defeat, and consequently to ridicule, which would be worse still, for it is as deadly in Africa as in Europe. Diplomacy thus becomes a cardinal virtue in the exercise of marital authority. The husband is obliged to be a good fellow, and to act according to circumstances and the characters of those who surround him. Despotism here realizes that brutal coercion is not always a triumphant argument.

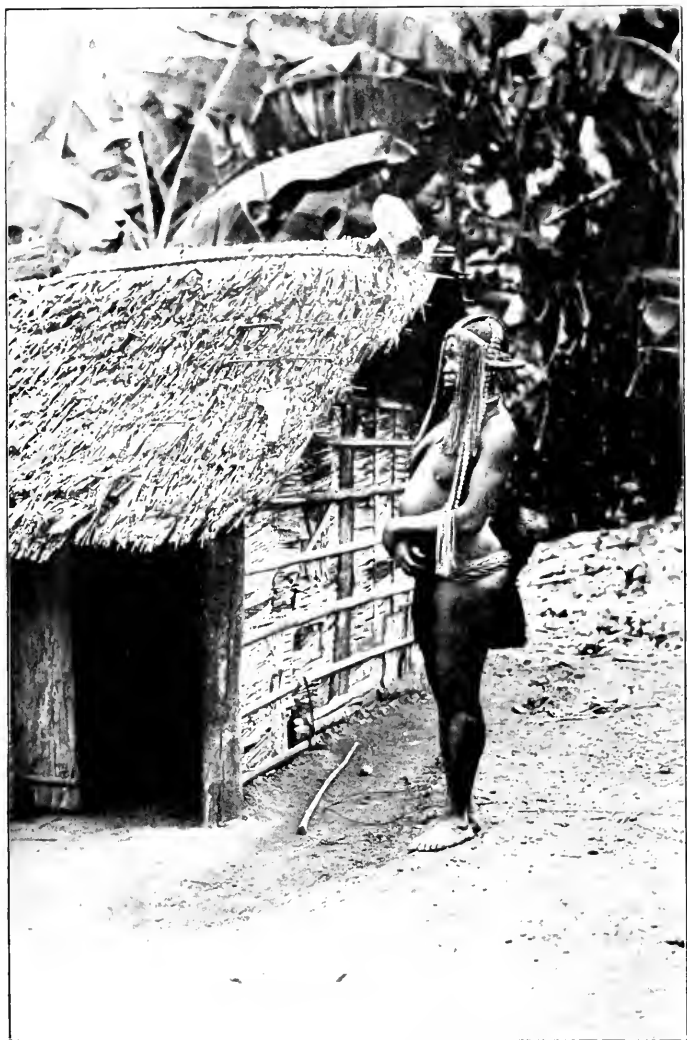
Such condescension, however, does not prevent the husband from having a profound sense of his own dignity. In order to emphasize the distance which separates masculine supremacy from the abasement of the weaker sex, the head of the family sleeps in a separate hut, in which he also locks up his valuables, and likewise takes his food alone or with other men. His women serve him, but never eat with him.

His occupations are restricted to outside matters,

to intercourse with other families and with neighbouring villages, to trade in valuable products, to hunting, fighting, and litigation—all of which are his exclusive province. He shares the physical life of the household only in building huts and in making important clearings on the land. He is utterly indifferent to the care and upbringing of his children, for it would be a lowering of his dignity even to think about them. His aristocratic superiority, as a man and head of a family, soars high above such vulgar female occupations. To sum up, his Majesty the Husband does little or nothing at all, but divides his life between eating and sleeping, the pleasures of love and repose, and everlasting babble.

### 3. THE WIFE'S POSITION.

The wife's lot by no means consists of such soft and flower-decked bliss, for the normal demands of life must be satisfied in the community, and, since the man refuses to assume anything save the smallest and easiest share, almost all the rough and laborious tasks devolve upon the woman. Hers is the toil of housekeeping and of cultivating the plantations; hers the drudgery of love and of the bearing, nursing, and upbringing of children. How many times in Africa one sees the picture which I describe below, and which perfectly symbolizes the respective positions of the married pair! Two or three women slowly follow the windings of a fatiguing path. Each one carries a child astride her hip and about seventy pounds of wood or manioc balanced on her head. They come laboriously on, their legs straining, their breasts swinging, their necks rigid beneath the load, their waists bent out of shape by the uneven weight of the child, their veins swollen and their skins streaked with a coating of sweat and dust and rancid oil. A few steps behind them comes strolling along the husband, brisk, active, and fresh, holding a light, flexible assagai delicately between his



*Plate VII.*

A FAN WOMAN.

To face page 122.









FAN WOMEN RETURNING FROM THE PLANTATION.

thumb and index finger. There you have an accurate portrait of the Congo pair.

But women of the civilized world need not pity this savage female. Her horizon is restricted to her cooking-pots, her hoe, her kneading-trough, her back-basket, and her strap for carrying the baby. From a remote antiquity, and from mother to daughter, her nature has been broken in to a state of dependency which is equivalent to slavery. She is resigned to it in advance, accepting unconsciously and passively the triple lot which makes her a valuable animal, a beast of burden, and the tool of sex. One need not attempt to deliver her from this condition, for she would not understand. One may oppose, deflect, and denaturalize these propensities which now form part of her race's organism and amount to instincts ; but one cannot eradicate them. Primitive man's ideas on this subject are not as unreasonable and revolting as they appear at first sight. We may explain them by the fact that, counting the beginning of the courses, the menopause, the menstrual periods, pregnancy, and lactation, woman is either occupied with her generative functions for at least half her life, or, as seems likely to happen in our time, her great and beautiful natural function must be sacrificed at the expense of the general birth-rate by a process which perhaps partakes more of degeneracy than of intellectual progress. The corresponding function in man does not divert him from his other occupations save for a brief few moments.

It is an almost universal custom for wives not to lodge with their husbands. According to different tribes, they either occupy separate huts or else each has her private chamber in the circle of a large common hut. Elsewhere, again, among the Fans, the wives of each husband live together in the same hut, which contains the cooking-hearth, hurdles for smoking meat, culinary utensils, and agricultural implements.

I have already mentioned the fact that the two sexes take their meals apart.

There is no system of precedence among the wives of a single man, but the most intelligent, skilful, and experienced woman is the head. There is open competition between wives for the favours of the husband, and she is sure of victory who understands how to surround her spouse with flattering attentions, to win his confidence, to give him wise advice, and to gain an ascendancy over him. She then becomes his confidante, is entrusted with his secrets, and learns the hiding-places in which he conceals his treasures. She ends by beguiling him so thoroughly, thanks to the susceptibility of these races, that he decides nothing unless he has previously had her advice, and does not bring a new wife into the harem unless he has first submitted her to the favourite's approval.

The first wife must be very stupid if she cannot win and keep this privileged place. She is pre-destined to it by her very seniority, by her thorough knowledge of her husband's habits, and by the ground she was able to gain in his good graces when she was as yet the only wife.

The husband accords his favours to his different wives in succession. Occasionally he bestows the honour of his company upon each one for several nights, one after the other, while at other times he changes every evening. The meeting takes place either in the husband's hut or that of the wife, according to the custom of each tribe and the arrangement of the huts.

Some Natives tell me that there are certain men who make the whole tour of their harems every day, even if they have twenty wives ; but I do not know how much belief can be accorded to this statement, which would have made the authors of our most Gallic tales turn pale.

But, however these things may be, here again this distributive law betrays the anxiety to keep peace in

the family by not granting special privileges or favours to any one. Any derogation from this rule, such as an unduly conspicuous preference, flutters the hen-roost. At first there are mere murmurs, then lively protests, then altercations and blows among the ladies ; then the poor husband is isolated, there is a strike in the kitchen, and reluctance to be merry. The wives declare a covert and insidious war, to which the man must yield if he values his peace and comfort. Once more, and in a different light, we see how a wife counterbalances a husband's tyranny. Sometimes she goes still farther. In serious cases she adopts energetic measures for quelling the frenzy of her fiery lord, and by a vigorous wrench at a part which is ill-defended by the waistcloth instantly changes the storm to calm.

After all that I have said heretofore of the Congo woman as a sign of wealth and social rank, I find some difficulty in isolating and defining another of her aspects, which at first appears like a mere superficial shade of difference, but which emerges more distinctly in the light of close observation and contemplation. The ideas of primitive men often seem much more complex than our own. Upon better acquaintance one is quite surprised to discover in them an accumulation of latent concepts of which they themselves are not very clearly conscious. This is apparently due to a lack of co-ordination and generalization. They set all their concepts side by side, and do not bind them together by either natural or simply conventional connecting links. Minds which have been cultivated by inheritance and education, on the contrary, group their concepts and adjust one to the other until they make them join in a final term which crowns them all and gathers them into an orderly bundle. Thus when we wish to study primitive mankind—ancient as well as modern—and to render the external manifestations of their mental processes somewhat intelligible to our

civilized brothers, we must pick up the scattered bits as one would collect the works of a watch that had been taken to pieces, and then we must put them together in accordance with our own plan of generalization. Of course, there is every chance that we shall not reconstruct the whole exactly, for a great many combinations of these psychic ingredients are possible, while the probability of bringing about any one of them is determined by factors which are likewise multiple, and whose number and the proportions in which they participate in the whole are unknown to us. Primitive man experiences at least one of these combinations, but accounts for neither the arrangement nor respective relations of the component parts ; while the psychologist finds it exceedingly difficult not to omit the very tiniest spring of this mental mechanism, which, as he knows, may not be the least important, even though it is the smallest.

Now, to come back to our subject, there are certain indications which lead us to suspect that the African Negro ascribes to woman some dim sort of sacred character, a mystic nature, as it were. It is one of those mysterious, vague, unexplained tenets which underlie all beliefs in general, and the beliefs of the African Negro in particular. Later, in speaking of religion, I shall recur to this aspect of the question. Moreover, what I shall call, for lack of a better name, this sacred quality of woman is peculiarly distinct among tribes who have not come into immediate contact with ourselves. It manifests itself in religious observances, prohibitions, and ceremonies, as also in the distance at which women are kept from all intercourse with strangers, and which has wrongly been considered the expression of a natural feeling of chastity. The origin of this concept is complex ; in part it is connected with the idea of value or wealth ascribed to woman, while in part, as we shall see later, it aims to tie down the weaker sex to its present

state of thralldom. But surely we must also see in it some feeling of superstitious veneration for woman's natural functions, particularly for that of conception, whose nature is so mysterious, even to us. However little capable of reflection the Negro may be, he is observant for all that, and the puzzle of Nature's laws awakens his instinct of universal causality. Not knowing how to analyse and fathom the problem, he contents himself with seeking its solution in the direct action of higher and inscrutable powers.

We may observe that later, when the Native becomes civilized, this half-mystic, half-sacred character ascribed to woman weakens or changes, at least in practice. In the course of this investigation I shall have occasion to take up these considerations again under different aspects which will explain them more fully.

## CHAPTER III

### THE CHILDREN

THE Negro family does not generally appear to be very prolific. It is true that we have no data on this point save the very superficial impression to be gained in travelling about the country, for the attempts at a census have hitherto been so very untrustworthy and incomplete that conclusions drawn from them at present would be more deceptive than even a rough estimate, and, above all, we should be under a dangerous illusion as to the correctness of their figures.

Not wishing, however, to confine myself to mere guesswork, I proceeded to take a small census myself by asking a certain number of women how many children they had, living or dead, and noting these children's approximate ages, which I found ranged from sixteen to twenty-eight years and gave an average of twenty-one. The result was that there were two children for every six women, and of these only half were alive, so that it made an average of one child to every six women. It will be objected that this estimate included too few persons, and that it did not embrace a long enough period of their lives. The reader, however, knows already that the sexual life of the Negress begins very early, that she is consequently able to produce offspring very early too, and that the proportion of children to women should therefore apparently have been substantially larger ; while, on the other hand, any deficiency in the quantitative value of



my census was corrected by its fortuitous nature, for the individuals composing it were taken just as they presented themselves and without being selected. As a matter of fact, accuracy was out of the question, and I merely desired a check upon my personal impressions and those of the various investigators who had given me their opinions on this important detail of African demography.

Our first conclusion from the above is that the birth-rate is not as high in the Congo tribes as one might fancy would be the case among savage races, and the second is that their infant mortality is considerable. The latter is corroborated by many other proofs, especially those furnished by medical cases.

From what I have already said of the importance which the father of a family attaches to the possession of children, and especially of female children, we understand that he would not only not countenance a decrease in his family, but would probably consider the death of his offspring a great misfortune ; and therefore we may assume that abortion is very rarely practised, at any rate by married women.

Polygamy, which is ruinous in countries where it assumes a jealous and repellent air, can here be only a contributory to the birth-rate, because the laxity of the Natives' morals and the facility which they grant women for other than connubial diversions are an unfailing guarantee against the husband's eventual impotence. Lastly, the woman herself wishes to become a mother. Chief among the causes of the low birth-rate we must count the long and frequent periods during which the woman is incapacitated either by religious injunctions which forbid her to cohabit with her husband under certain circumstances that I shall enumerate later on, or else by the unreasonably late date at which children are weaned. I have an idea, too, that if the laborious tasks which she is compelled to perform are not actually unfavourable to conception, they must in

any case often bring about premature confinement, but I have no exact information on this subject.

Lastly, the wretched physical conditions so prevalent in Tropical Africa must be considered one of the causes most detrimental to the growth of the population, for they weaken the mother's power of conception and occasion miscarriage, while to the child they bequeath organic weakness and a constitution so puny that he cannot survive.

As a general rule, children of both sexes belong to the head of the house, whoever their real father may be, and whether their birth has taken place before marriage or after. It does not lie within the husband's province to cast doubts upon children born in wedlock. Indeed, he willingly accepts the old adage of Roman law : "Is pater est quem nuptiæ demonstrant," and, far from protesting against its application, makes use of it to enforce his claim to the title of father, even when he feels certain that the new-born babe is the fruit of adultery. We know already that Black Menelaus is not indulging in some vague, platonic bit of sentimentalism in this matter, but that he has a calculating mind ; for if the lady's lover, by way of exception, feels the yearnings of a father's compassion and takes it into his head to demand the child of his amour, the spurious father, who in this case is the legal father, stands upon his rights and will not consent to part with his supposititious offspring until after endless palavers and the payment of a reasonable compensation.

Pre-nuptial children are subject to special stipulations when a marriage is negotiated, for according to their age they are either left with their mother's family or else follow the bride to her husband's home, in which latter case the wife's family of course increase their charges to correspond.

Affection between parents and children is a feeling so natural and so common to all the animal world that

it must exist in the Negro. It is a more spontaneous and fundamental instinct in the mother, there being in this respect no difference between the human female and the female of our "humbler brothers."

The Negro father is more indifferent ; but still, one may often see him caressing the babies and playing with them. Their frolics, their pranks, their clumsy grace, and their almost feeble gait amuse him for a moment, when he is not engrossed in the superior preoccupations of his repose or palavers. Undoubtedly he feels a dim tenderness, a delicate, indefinable sensation which mingles with his pride in his own strength, when he handles their slender limbs, their soft flesh, and their weak, slim bodies, so helpless in their entire nudity ; but his primitive and barbarous sensibility does not yet extend to abstract feelings of goodness or of pity for weakness.<sup>1</sup> Let us not, however, accuse him of being a bad father because he is only moderately affectionate. The little one is his wife's child, it is true, but is it his? How is he to believe that he is the exclusive author of its being, when he has had collaborators, perhaps many of them? This, however, makes little difference, for he never discriminates between the children of his family, no matter what their origin may be. He does not allow himself to make any inquiry into their paternity, but treats them all alike, and on the whole is fairly kind to them. He throws upon the mother all his duties of providing food, and providential Nature does the rest. He shows courage and prudence in assuming the duty of protecting his family, for it is not only his paternal tenderness which prompts him to defend his wife's progeny, but also his pride as a chieftain and the anxiety that he feels for his fortune, which would be imperilled by their loss. At the least sign of danger he is quick to send his wives and

<sup>1</sup> The Native of the Congo is in this respect very inferior to the Senegalese and Sudanese, who have a strongly developed instinct of affection.

children to the most inaccessible and unknown spots in the depths of the forest or the midst of the swamps.

Paternal control has no abstract meaning for the Negro. As long as a child is small, he is of course dominated by the comparative size and strength of his parents and by the necessity which obliges him to entrust himself to them for all his desires in life and for protection. From his mother's womb dim organic memory gives him the intuition of a dependence which the instinct of self-preservation makes him accept as a condition of life or death that he cannot escape ; and this subordination of child to mother is still further strengthened by their reciprocal subjection during the period of lactation. But it is only as his understanding emerges from the inner world of purely organic sensation, and gradually opens to external phenomena, that he begins to comprehend the growing share which the father of the family has in his existence. Down in the depths of his subconsciousness his senses first record an impression of such pleasures as rocking, peaceful slumber, security, games, laughter, and titbits devoured with sensuous delight, all of which are associated with the vision of two familiar beings, seen over and over again. Then, the first time that he is punished there appears the concept of an external but benevolent will which can oppose his desire and curb his spontaneous natural enthusiasm. Soon after learning that the same individual is alternately the cause of pleasure and pain, it is demonstrated to him that the ultimate purpose of both is favourable to his development. Thus from the very beginning of his life there springs up and develops in his mind a concept, which is concrete at first and which becomes more and more abstract, of a being which is superior, but at the same time protective, and he conceives of and bows to an authority which he must endure because it is strong, which he must respect because it is advantageous, and whose sanction has the two faces of reward and punishment.

Our observation of the primitive African thus shows us that the first principle, the fundamental and necessary ingredient of social authority, lies in paternal control. Doubtless it is weak in the embryonic domestic group and in savagedom, where its ties are slack and liable to break at any moment ; but little by little we shall see it extend its sway. After it has united the direct descendants, it embraces distant relatives and other strangers attracted to and incorporated in the original nucleus by motives of self-interest ; and the father of the family soon changes his title for that of chieftain, or rather holds both titles at once. Eventually the recognition of control as a concrete fact embodied in the human form of the chieftain, or as an abstract principle, broadens out, and becomes an indispensable condition for the existence of a community which is in a high degree jointly responsible for the protection of the persons, property, activities, and liberty of each of its members. But curiously enough we shall see that although the father originates the principle of control in the bosom of the family, he eventually becomes a mere weak symbol of it when the family afterwards develops into society. We shall see an antagonism manifested almost from the beginning between individual control and that which is held to emanate from the majority. The former lies open to the accusation of tyranny when it attempts to obtrude itself by its own power and for its own advantage. The original source of the latter is in the most secret recesses of the human soul.<sup>1</sup>

As the young Negro grows and gains strength, his increasing egoism gradually weans him away from his parents. His personality develops and he becomes conscious that his increasing strength and practical experience are imperceptibly making him the peer of those whom but yesterday he feared, and, since gratitude is an unknown virtue in the African Tropics, he quickly

<sup>1</sup> See p. 272.

shakes off his parents' guardianship, either by leaving their village or by remaining as a simple client of him whom we may now call his former father.

The young child has a rather pleasant life with a mother who has all the instinctive devotion for him which any female has for its young, and a father who, though certainly much more indifferent than she, is always kind, as it is to his advantage to be.

Theoretically every male child is on an equality with his brothers. Where inequality exists—I am sorry that this remark contradicts Rousseau—it is entirely due to Nature. The children are differentiated by age, physical strength, activity, and intelligence, and moreover the reader knows from what he has seen of Negro psychology before, that a weak, unfit, and useless individual soon disappears as a result of the indifference or persecution of the community.

On the other hand, the father often singles out one of his children on account of some remarkable gift, exalts him to the rank of favourite, factotum, and representative, gradually initiates him into his business, confides his secrets to him and shows him his hiding-places. The eldest son obviously has the most likelihood of occupying this privileged position, unless he forfeits it by stupidity or ill-health.

From my previous remarks about polygamy and the form of polyandry which is more or less acknowledged, we may readily conjecture that the most diversified combinations of relationship are to be found among children of the same household. There will be brothers and sisters of the same father and mother ; of the same father and different mothers, and of the same mother and different fathers ; but no practical difference is made between them. They are given the same treatment, the same care and the same neglect or privileges, according to the natural gifts and inclinations of each

one and the services which he is capable of rendering to the community.

The daughter is a slave, who can only obey, and like her mother and the other wives of the head of the family, is kept in the monotonous servitude which is to be her lot all her life long. She learns to serve her future husband by making herself familiar with the duties of the household and by helping to wait upon her father, and this is the whole of her education.

Mutual affection between brothers and sisters is genuine enough, as is proved by the delight they evince and the signs of fondness they lavish upon one another when they meet after a long separation. This sentiment is doubtless superficial, and we may look upon it as a mere habit acquired by their association in early childhood rather than as a tie so close as to imply devotion. I admit that it is a little higher than the mere domain of sensation, but it still falls far short of the lofty regions where unselfish affection reigns, and when its first transport is over egoism and indifference once more resume their sway.

There are a few instances of adoption, but naturally of male children only, for the adoption of a girl would be equivalent to marriage. Moreover, even in the case of a boy who is not yet emancipated from paternal control and not old enough to be full master of his person, the adoptive father must recompense the real father, and thus there is hardly any difference between the adoptive child and the slave, so that we pass imperceptibly from one class to the other.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE SLAVE

WE Europeans generally form quite an erroneous idea of slavery in Central Africa ; for we consider it too much from the point of view of ourselves as civilized beings who are at last delivered from this barbarous institution, and we do not reflect that it was one of the necessary stages in our evolution. Moreover, we confuse it with the slave-trade and the horrors which white slave-dealers practised in connection with the latter. Hence I consider it advisable at this juncture to make an impartial investigation of slavery as it exists among the Natives themselves, and to study it as divested of all foreign elements, just as it was before European interference had modified its character or impeded its freedom.

The truth is that in the Congo the slave is a super-added member of the family, and that he rounds out the Negro's idea of that social organism. He is a sham member of this family, an artificial child, if I may say so, who is purchased as offspring by the father, because the natural process of procreation does not increase the family to a sufficient extent. In this connection it appears to me that it will be useful to emphasize again certain economic considerations, which I have touched upon before, but which I shall now resume under another aspect.

The institution of slavery among primitive races is apparently quite easily explained by the strong man's



desire to throw the burden of his laborious and disagreeable tasks upon the weak man—the conquered—and to make the latter aid him in the satisfaction of his desires and the acquirement of fresh pleasures. It cannot, however, be denied that this point of view is too circumscribed, for slavery has played an economic part of the first rank in history, and has been, moreover, in no paradoxical sense, a powerful instrument of progress. Negro society is a living demonstration of this.

In fact, we must picture to ourselves a definite social group, which is very different from our modern state of civilization. Money does not exist in it, or else is still but a rare and imperfect medium. Labour is scarce, because the savage is not really industrious, has only natural desires and does not aspire to improve his condition, or, rather, has no firm will to bring about any such improvement. We may ask what will befall an individual or a group who, amid dull and unmanageable neighbours, are endowed with fair natural gifts and hence form new aspirations, desire active employment and are imbued with the spirit of enterprise. The time soon comes when the personal means of the individual or the group under consideration no longer suffice for the effort required by undertakings which are gradually increasing in extent, and such projects must be abandoned, their originators must perish in the task, or else resort must be had to outside help. In modern civilized society the dense populations which are crowded into a comparatively small area and the severe competition for a livelihood which results from such crowding doom the citizens to incessant toil, under pain of poverty and death. The supply of labour eventually exceeds the demand, with the result that money always possesses an assured and positive value under the form of work, and hence sums earned previously readily procure what labour is necessary for enlarging one's undertakings.

Such is not the case in countries where the population

is scanty, scattered, retrograde, and sluggish ; for here the masses have no ambition beyond the partial satisfaction of their physical wants, and the supply of labour being nil, the demand evokes no reply. An intelligent and enterprising man, who may happen to spring up in such an environment, sees his initiative entirely checked by an obstacle which is feeble, sluggish, and unresisting. The only resource left him is compulsion, which he may employ by making war upon neighbouring tribes, carrying them off as prisoners and subjecting them to various forms of work, forced labour, and industrial occupations.

What I have just said may be expressed in a more abstract form, which at the same time has the advantage of being more generalized. Between the primitive ages and the modern era a tremendous revolution has taken place. Ancient society was obliged to conserve actual energy in the form of an ever-present and constantly available servile labouring class. Modern society makes this energy potential in the form of money, distributes it, concentrates it and divides it, saves it or squanders it at will. But since money is only a potentiality, we understand that this potentiality must be realizable at need in any one of those forms of actual energy in which the labour of human beings has always had an important share. Of course the magnitude of the advance which is made consists not so much in the discovery of this quite conventional method of representing value as in the mutual responsibility, the sort of implicit contractual bond, which it presupposes between the members of the same social group, and which allows no one to isolate himself from his peers, to act apart from them, to invent, undertake or accomplish anything without entering into a sort of unconscious, but unescapable co-operation with his fellows. The spirit of enterprise cannot thrive and bear fruit except in a hard-working society, for money has no inherent virtue, and is naught but a vain effigy if it cannot be

exchanged at any time for human labour or the natural forces which are utilized and transformed thereby.

We now understand why the colonizing races of our day find so many and such great difficulties in new countries, and why we see them wavering incessantly between weak inaction and the worst sorts of brutality. It is because they have debarred themselves from the employment of frank and openly acknowledged measures of coercion, out of a feeling of generous benevolence, and, by an anachronism which the Negro himself does not understand, would fain make the savage obey motives which do not exist and which civilized man has acquired only through the arduous apprenticeship of centuries.

By incorporating slaves into his family, the Negro merely secures a constantly available labouring class, a form of mechanical energy which, no matter how submissive it may seem, has the serious defect of being linked with another will, and which is consequently never a perfectly blind and obedient tool.

In all periods and all countries, in Tropical Africa as well as everywhere else, slaves are first recruited by war, kidnapping, and the man-hunt. Not so very long ago certain tribes in the interior were in a permanent state of hostility, and the sudden attacks of each side in turn gave the conqueror a batch of prisoners, who were sold to middlemen and gradually removed to localities that were far distant from their original homes. During the last few years the European occupation has established peace and order in most of these districts, and hence the most cruel and ruinous source of slave recruiting has been considerably diminished. But certain persons are still doomed to servitude, such as individuals who are straying alone in foreign territory, insolvent debtors, children carried off as hostages for a theft, the sons and daughters of slaves, or, in a word, all those whose liberty is not guaranteed either by ties of

relationship or race, by fear of reprisals on the part of the victim's village against his ravisher, or by a dominant political and commercial self-interest.

The slave, like any other commodity, varies greatly in price according to different times and districts. He is most valuable near the coast. Age, sex, nationality, and health also make a great difference in his cost. The following is a rough estimate of such prices in various districts :—

*The Lower Congo.*—For a grown man : 16 loads of salt (£1 19s.), 1 gun (12s.), 1 coverlet (4s.), 1 keg of powder (6s. 6d.), 1 porcelain statue (3s. 3d.), 1 water-jug and basin (8s.), 1 chopper (10d.), 1 hat or cap (4s.), 1 coral necklace (1s. 6d.), 1 Neptune (a kind of large brass platter (8s.), 25 pieces of cloth of 4 fathoms each (i.e. about 7 yards 4 inches, £2). Total about £6. For a grown woman the price is about the same. For a child, either boy or girl, it is : 9 loads of salt (21s. 6d.), 1 large keg of powder (6s. 6d.), 1 statue (3s. 3d.), 1 chopper (10d.), 1 coverlet (4s.), 1 water-jug and basin (8s.), twelve and a half pieces of cloth (21s.).

For an old woman the price is the same as for a child. A young child is bought at the same time as the mother, and adds 4 loads of salt (10s.) to her value.

Other estimates in the same district are : For a grown man or woman : 20 loads of salt, 100 cortades<sup>1</sup> of cloth, 1 plate, 1 fork, 1 keg of powder, 1 gun, 1 chopper, 1 basin, 1 water-jug, 1 small knife, 1 coat, and 1 hat or cap. Total about £7 10s. 5d.

A young person of either sex is worth 200 cortades or £4, a child 100 cortades or £2.

*The Middle Sanga.*—Average price for a man or woman : 50 mid-jokos (£2 14s.), 5 pieces of cloth (30s.), 2 katas (1s. 6d.), and 2 necklaces of glass beads (10d.). On the borders of the Bahr-al-Ghazal slaves are cheaper, and cost about £1 12s., and I have seen children six or eight years old bought for one or two fathoms of cloth.

Take it all in all, the servile condition of the African Negro is not very unpleasant. In the eyes of the passing stranger there is nothing to distinguish the slave from the free man—no outer indication, either of dress, bearing, language, or occupation. All live in the same confused promiscuity and upon a footing of perfect equality. The similarity is far-reaching, and

<sup>1</sup> Value 5d.

applies not only to their manner of life, but to the right of marrying and of owning property as well. Nay, what is more, the slave may in his turn own slaves, who are his exclusive property, for theoretically the only thing which he cannot possess is his own person. This is apparently a strange anomaly, but the difficulty is easily removed if one tries not to think of slavery in the abstract, but of the benefit which the master hopes to gain from it by judicious management. This peculiar arrangement is not guaranteed by any written law, nor even by any oral tradition, as far as we can learn ; so that it can hold good only because it is to the mutual advantage of the two parties. As far as the slave is concerned, it is solely a matter of intelligence and personal influence. If he is energetic and enterprising, if he has a fluent tongue and can make himself useful, he soon becomes indispensable, and his master will beware of doing anything to annoy or injure such a fine fellow, who is the salvation of the community, who is making his owner's business a success, and who perhaps knows any amount of helpful or harmful secrets. What matters his origin if he is well domesticated in his new tribe and identifies himself with its desires, its sorrows, and its joys? Transplanted into a new country, as he is, without the possibility of returning to his former home, he has no alternative but to become completely naturalized. Flight would give him nothing but the prospect of a harder lot, perhaps of death, and in any case would force him to begin life anew in some other village, while here his foot is in the stirrup. His influence increases in the village and then extends to the places round about, and if events only favour him his growing wealth will lead to independence, for he will enfranchise himself by the very force of circumstances, will become the head of a family and the chief of a village, and will finally rule over free men.

The confusion between the slave and the free man,

however, is not only the result of a habit due to a series of more or less accidental circumstances, since the usual terms employed even by the real members of the family show that it has to do with a special concept. A father calls his slave *mwana*, "child," or "son," and the slave in reply gives him the name *tata* or *tara* (according to the tribe), which means "father." The name "brother" is employed in an analogous way, but the words which signify it are less generally used among the different Bantu tribes than are those of "father" and "son."

These various terms are applied so indifferently to the natural and artificial members of the family as to lead one to believe, on the one hand, that the Negro does not attach the slightest importance to the ties of blood, and, on the other, that the meanings of the words *mwana* and *tata*, which I have just given, also imply those of "child, son, offspring, client, protégé, subject, trusty friend, and vassal," in the first case, and in the second those of "father, lineal predecessor, venerable individual, master, and suzerain." The colloquial speech, moreover, shows very clearly that the words *tata* and *mwana* are used as terms of respect for a superior. Such is the ambiguous use of the word for son and slave that when the Negro wishes to make his meaning clear he designates the former by the more definite expression "son of the body," and, indeed, often illustrates his meaning by seizing his genitalia in his hand through his waistcloth—a gesture which can leave no doubt on the matter in the mind of the person with whom he is speaking.

Thus we see that the ordinary condition of the slave in Tropical Africa is not at all so pitiable as has been fancied by people who have judged it only from a distance. The slave is a child of the family, which word we must take in the narrow meaning bestowed upon it by the Semites, rather than the very broad signification that the Romans gave to the word *familia*,

which institution, though it included the slaves, kept them in an infinitely more cruel subjection. It is undeniable that the African slave is sometimes ill-treated and cruelly abandoned to poverty, hunger, and sickness ; but these are accidents to which he is liable in almost the same way as a free man, like whom he is subject to that relentless law of Nature, so triumphant in Tropical Africa, which exalts the fit at the expense of the unfit, and from which, as we know, there is no appeal in these parts. Here, again, nothing distinguishes the purchased *mwana* from the *mwana* by blood. The slave has only one disadvantage, in that he is a stranger, and as such is of no importance to any one ; so that his misfortunes awaken no spark of instinctive sympathy, nor the slightest vibration of mere animal sensitiveness in those who surround him.

Like the wife, he is a commodity, an interest-bearing form of capital ; but here again the fact that he is a stranger permits of his being sold without fear of reprisals, for he has no parents or connections and may be disposed of indefinitely. While the husband is accountable to his wife's parents for his treatment of her, the slave's welfare is not secured by any guarantee or any counterweight save his own physical and intellectual value, and the entirely egoistic interest which his master may have in preserving and protecting him.

Moreover, as we have seen in the psychological portion of this investigation, the slave is a fatalist, and resignation is natural to him. The blows of fortune find him passive and unresisting, and he does not make the tiniest effort to escape from his position. His docility and blind submissiveness are absolutely incomprehensible to modern Europeans, whose ancestors would perhaps have understood them, for this very sort of abnegation was a dominant feature of the races of antiquity. Modern man, however, cannot imagine why the slave does not escape when space lies broad outstretched upon every side of him ; why he does not

rebel and slay his tyrant ; what strange qualms of conscience induce him cringingly to give his master all the wages which he has earned by hard work outside ; why, when the day's drudgery is done, some silly instinct takes him back to his lord, where he is sure to find other forms of toil awaiting him ; or, finally, why he prefers the vicissitudes of captivity to the laborious but independent life which we offer him. In our stations we constantly see slaves who are far away from their masters, and who are consequently at liberty to enfranchise themselves, but yet remit punctually all the money they earn and divest themselves of their most precious possessions in their masters' favour. It seems a strange aberration of the sense of human personality—an inexplicable renunciation of the Ego. So powerful are the "organized habits" of the individual and the race that if you should wish to liberate a slave he would by no means desire it. He prefers servitude, which has its perils, but which gives him the enjoyment of his hut of leaves, his loitering walks, his palavers, the filth, the rancid odour of palm-oil, the nauseous dishes, and the unexpected events of wild life—all this he prefers to a semblance of liberty in the great cold dwellings of the Europeans, to regular, monotonous work, whose remote object he does not know, and to the manifold restraints of a life which is complicated to an extreme without any apparent reason. On the one hand, there are, so to speak, the fascinating risks of the game, which has its reverses of poverty and even of death, it is true, but which possesses keen and immediate pleasures and the possibility of further good luck. On the other hand, there is moderate, tame contentment and a continuous, monotonous subservience to the daily task, which are things that do not at all suit the fickle, impulsive, heedless, and improvident Negro character.

The foregoing applies almost equally to male and



female slaves, for both discharge the same functions in Negro society as do their free congeners. The man assumes his share of masculine labours—a very large share, of course, since his object in life is to be profitable to his master. The woman has her place in the harem, and is not distinguished from the other women either by their common origin, which is purchase in both cases, or by the equally servile duties which all perform alike. They have the same work in the garden, the same maternal duties, and the same concern for their common husband. Save for the circumstance that the slave woman has no parents, relatives, or connections who would take her side at need, even though their motive might be selfish, there is nothing to distinguish her from the free woman. If the master does not monopolize her, or when he tires of her, she may contract marriage with a man of her own station, though the union is obviously very precarious, since it is dependent upon the master's caprice and selfishness, as well as the hazards of fortune.

The slave child needs no special mention, for he grows up anyhow with the free children and shares their games and occupations.

I cannot emphasize too much the complete confusion which exists theoretically between the free and slave members of Negro society. Since the scales which weigh them both obey no human law, but the law of Nature only, they are the same for both, and both slave and free have the same chances of good fortune or bad ; only the probability of ill-luck is stronger in the case of the slave, because of his isolation and his lack of connections and support. Happy is he if Nature, besides endowing him with physical and intellectual gifts, by way of compensation fills his cup of blessings with good luck too, and thus re-establishes equality ! Under these circumstances the word "enfranchisement" has no meaning for the African

of the Tropics. To be or to become free is to possess from birth, or to acquire, aptitudes, qualities, and moral and material means which serve to protect one against mankind and the crosses of life. The slave becomes comparable to those whom I have for the sake of convenience called free men when he possesses the whole physical and intellectual equipment indispensable to one who fights the fierce battle of primitive life, and when the prestige which he has been able to acquire lifts him above his original state of inferiority. In this, and this alone, the formalities of enfranchisement consist.

Everything which has been said in this chapter is put wrong by one single tribe, the Fans ; for among them slavery does not exist, and, indeed, their dialect has no word for it. Why does this great nation, which is so peculiar in many respects, in this case again run counter to the customs of the neighbouring tribes with whom it is intermingled, and from whom it does not appear to differ either in the original structure of its language or in its ethnic ancestry? The tribes whom the Fans have encountered in their progressive and irresistible expansion they have been satisfied to disintegrate, to break up and to dissolve as though by some slow corrosive process, without making open war upon them ; but they have not enslaved them, though they might have done so, for they are strong and warlike. This cannot be due to an instinctive concern for the purity of their blood, which is a reason of no importance to the Black Man. It cannot be because they lack the spirit of practical enterprise, for, on the contrary, the rough woodland which is their native country requires indefatigable perseverance of endeavour and incessant struggle against refractory natural surroundings. It is certainly not due to respect for any tradition, for on the outskirts of their territory, where their primitive savagedom has already been

ameliorated by contact with tribes of milder manners and customs, they have not borrowed the institution of slavery from their neighbours. Is it some profound and perhaps philosophical sentiment of human liberty which makes them extend to others the anarchy they enjoy themselves? However this may be, one must not see in it any mental reservation of an altruistic nature, against which, as is well known, the mental make-up of primitive man is wellnigh closed, but merely the negative effect, so to speak, of that anarchical concept which is ignorant of even the simplest principle of subordination.

I am disposed to think that the real reason is to be found in this latter point of view, but in a somewhat different form. Despite his genuine good qualities of intelligence and energy, the Fan is at a lower stage of economic evolution than his neighbours. The state of anarchy in which he lives, the lack of authority, his dislike of obedience, and his aversion to restraint and discipline isolate the individual in the mass and make him economically weak. His cities are conglomerates and mixtures, but not combinations ; juxtapositions, not communities. The lack of the concept of authority has prevented him from taking the first and apparently the indispensable step in economic progress, which is slavery. His resources of available labour are reduced to himself and his wives, for he cannot count upon his adult sons at all. He has not yet learned to increase his capital—that is to say, his means of initiating and executing new enterprises by a complementary family. Fortunately, as we shall see later, he is enabled to supply this deficiency by his strength of character and his profound racial instincts.

## CHAPTER V

### DOMESTIC ECONOMY

I FANCY that my demonstration of the preponderant part which economic anxieties play in family life has been so thorough that this chapter may be no more than a mere recapitulation, from another point of view, of what I have said before.

Neither Pascal nor Rousseau nor their imitators are right in declaring the illegality and injustice of private property. There is no longer any need to disprove this, but it is once more formally contradicted by data obtained from the observation of man in that savage state which Rousseau loved so well. In his emphatic way the Genevan dreamer exclaimed: "You are lost if you forget that the fruits belong to all men, but the earth to none." Well, in the African bush the latter is exactly the case; the earth belongs to no one, no one claims it as property, no one dreams of delimiting or enclosing land, and yet the fruits do not belong to all men. Africa, like Europe, is not an earthly Paradise, where man may enjoy the bliss of idleness and the soil yields spontaneously the sustenance necessary for his existence. Between Nature and the satisfaction man derives from her there is interposed the hand of man himself, his labour, and that exceedingly personal factor, the mechanical energy which he expends, which is absolutely his own, and which is the essential part of him. If he had but to stoop and stretch out his arm to seize his food, even

this motion would cost him an effort, and he would in all fairness deserve the exclusive possession of the object seized. From that moment a partition of this object against his will would constitute real injustice, and from then on it is lawful for him to do what he likes with his property. He may appropriate it to his own needs, may reserve it for future use, or may make it over to another. The opposite would be a disavowal of human liberty and the rights of personality, since the object which is possessed becomes an emanation and, as it were, a symbol of this personality. With even more reason we may say the same thing of the bow, the harpoon, and the spear which man manufactures, of the house or the canoe which he builds, and of the bit of waste land or forest which he clears and plants. Now, if uncivilized countries have a superabundance of land which has no intrinsic value for a very sparse population, its products, on the contrary, take on value by the labour which they require, and give a temporary value to the field which bears them. This is so true that when a piece of ground changes owners the superficial area does not enter into the price under discussion, but compensation is demanded either in kind or trade goods for the bananas, potatoes, or other cultivated products of the soil.

An observation of primitive society therefore shows that private property originates in work ; but the Negro, who has an exclusively concrete idea of everything, ascribes no value to work unless it assumes the material form of a manufactured article or substance, such as a basket, a canoe, a fish, or a cake of manioc paste. Until he has been under European instruction for a long time he does not know how to translate into their monetary equivalent the time, delays, and stops, or, in a word, anything which is not palpably evident to the senses, and does not, for instance, consider that a fowl or a ground-nut costs more for being carried

two days than it did in the place from which it originally came.<sup>1</sup>

Hence in Tropical Africa there is no realty, for we cannot reasonably include as such the hut of branches, leaves, and straw which takes very little trouble to build. Personal property is itself of the simplest description, and consists of a few waistcloths, made of bark or fibre, some baskets, calabashes, vessels and dishes of badly baked clay, small heavy seats carved out of a block of wood, iron knives, spears, and missile weapons. Since the European invasion we may add cotton prints, shirts and hats, pots, petty knick-knacks, and ornaments of glass beads and tinsel. This is all the most perishable property that one can imagine. It is wealth which is at the mercy of a spark in a straw hut ; frail wealth, with nothing to protect it from the terrible mandibles of the termite, the ant, and the cockroach, from mould and rust ; wealth which is consumed almost as soon as acquired by the slow, relentless, disintegrating effect of the damp heat ; wealth which is not secured from theft by any construction of stone or brick, or any strong-box ; wealth which no law protects from the encroaching and tenacious cupidity of relatives and friends, who are a thousand times more to be dreaded than thieves.

What, then, is the Negro's real token of wealth?

Wealth is not a substance in itself, but a symbol, a potentiality, and to be rich is not to possess something, but to be able to do something. Wealth perishes as it is brought into being. In the case of civilized man, to be rich—to have power—is to possess in a potential form a number of satisfactions and pleasures which may be exchanged for an equivalent quantity of work extracted from the social body. The man who possesses wealth employs his resources first for the satisfaction of his most imperious desires, and then, since all these desires are limited by their very

<sup>1</sup> See p. 246.

nature, he devotes what remains over to a still further increase of his practical powers. He thus induces a geometrical progression, whose profits soon outdistance its author and overflow upon the community. The existence of wealthy individuals in a State hence appears to be an indispensable condition for its economic development; but at the same time wealth contains within itself the germs of decadence and death, because it produces an appetite for new pleasures, and because, by driving men to overwork, it exacts a usurious interest, both physical and intellectual, which slowly consumes both individuals and races.

In the case of primitive mankind who have not yet formed into groups or acquired mutual responsibilities towards their peers, wealth, as I have already explained, is the ability to control energy, not potential, but actual, in the form of wives and slaves. The family unit assures the common father of the means of subsistence, builds his huts, cultivates his plantations, prepares his food, and manufactures his tools, weapons, and utensils. But since such daily and hourly cares do not monopolize the whole household, both free and slave, even among savages, all the wives, children, and slaves, taken together, represent to neighbours and rivals a real power which is always available.

The chief token of the Negro's wealth is thus the number of his wives and slaves, which amounts to the same thing, in an economic sense. Primitive man has no real possession of any property but this, which is at least durable, if not imperishable, and which bears within itself the elements of its own preservation. Thrift and capitalization have not yet been discovered, for they presuppose the invention of the social structure, of security by means of a police force, and of what I will call "social reciprocity" rather than the "social contract." In our psychological investigation of the individual we saw that the Negro

was heedless of the future, but here we must note the first glimmer of a provident spirit, which shows itself first in the drying and granulation of manioc, in the smoking of fish and the smoke-drying of meat—all of which permit man to postpone the consumption of his provisions. Next comes the act of setting aside and depositing certain mediums of exchange in a place of safety upon one's own person. For lack of a purse, the Native of the Upper Ubangi puts his fortune on his head, plaiting the little glass beads which are his money into his hair in the shape of a helmet, and borrowing one or more rows from this clever head-dress at need. Other Natives wind brass wire around their arms and legs. The capitalist who is one degree higher in the scale buries his treasures of copper or iron in some hidden spot in the bush or in his hut, and sinks his ivory into the slime of the swamps. His favourite wife or eldest son, or else the most honest of his confidential friends, is alone initiated into the whole or a part of his secrets ; but African probity is proverbially frail and fickle, and, besides, it is obvious that the usage to which this wealth is subjected depreciates it rather than increases its value.

During such retrograde periods investment in human capital is hence the only safe and profitable one, and once more we see that the servitude of both wife and slave among primitive peoples is an economic factor of the first class and an element of progress.

From the above it follows that in the Negro family the natural law grants the right of possession only to the father, since to him belong the almost exclusive tokens of wealth in the form of wife and slave. We might even say that the wife is the only token of wealth, for she possesses nothing of her own but her savage finery, while a male slave may marry and possess property in his turn, and, by acquiring every external attribute of a free man, may win all the rights entitling him to enfranchisement and independence. The customs



in regard to inheritance are still more to the woman's disadvantage.

When the father of a family dies the property follows the collateral line of descent, not the direct, the fortune going to the brother of the deceased, and not to his children. Let us endeavour to discover the origin of this law of inheritance.

In the first place we must not lose sight of the fact that wives are the chief and almost the only token of wealth, then daughters (I have already explained the reason), and then slaves. Let us also note that in historical order wives certainly must have been the first nucleus, because sexual possession of woman must surely have preceded the conquest of captives. We have seen that the Fan, in particular, has but just arrived at this stage. Admitting this, it follows that should the inheritance devolve upon the male children, they, by inheriting the rights of the deceased to his wealth—that is to say, to his women—would become the husbands of their mothers and sisters, and hence there would follow a series of incestuous connections which are unquestionably condemned by the Black Man. Now if this living fortune is made over to the male collateral heirs there is nothing unsuitable about it, for marriages between brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law and between uncles and nieces do not infringe upon the laws of consanguinity.

I do not mention either direct or collateral female descendants, who with very rare exceptions count for nothing, nor have I anything to say of the wives' relatives, who can make no claim, since they have disposed of all such when they received the purchase price of the marriage, and since by right of purchase widows belong to the family of their common husband.

It is quite natural to infer that this law of inheritance should subsequently have been extended to other forms of property by virtue of continuity and in ignorance

of the quite instinctive feeling which dictated it in the dawn of human civilization. And, what is more, Oriental races gave it a semi-mystic character, and made it a pious duty, a religious obligation. Thus arose the levirate, which directed the childless widow to marry her brother-in-law, that she might raise up to her deceased husband a scion of his own stock, who should be considered as though begotten by him. It is not the last point of contact that we shall find between the customs of the Congo Negroes and the traditions of Oriental races, though we do not know whether they separately followed natural laws common to them both, or whether the Bantus were imbued with the Semitic religions in the eastern part of Africa before their dispersion.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE HISTORY OF AN INDIVIDUAL'S LIFE IN THE FAMILY

A DESCRIPTION of native life in Equatorial Africa can be neither clear nor full unless it portrays the individual in his natural attitude—in action, as it were—at the various periods of his existence. It seems to me that this is the best way of imparting life to the picture and of restoring to it a little of the vitality which analysis is apt to take from it at the expense of colour and truthfulness.

I shall accordingly follow the individual from birth to death, without any distinction of sex or social rank. We already know that there is very little difference between the free man and the slave, so that it will be sufficient for me to note, as we proceed, the peculiarities which each may exhibit ; while woman's position of entire subjection and obedience offers so few incidents worthy of notice that it will be easy to point them out at the proper time without fear of obscurity or repetition.

#### I. BIRTH.

Negresses, by whom I mean the savage women who have not yet come into contact with foreign civilization, are very anxious to become mothers, for, like the rest of the animal world, they feel to the full the appeal of their natural function, not perverted as yet either by that instinct of individual self-preservation

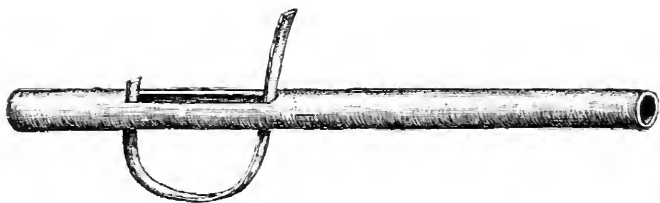
which stifles the instinct of racial preservation where the population is very crowded, or by the discovery of new pleasures which lend Art's aid to Nature for the crossing of her normal purpose, or, again, by vice which springs from a premature refinement of morals. Thus an instinctive desire of conception luckily furthers the avarice of the head of the family, who, as we know, has an interest in multiplying his offspring either for its commercial value or for the increase of his clan's importance. From these facts we see at a glance that criminal abortion is unknown among these primitive tribes, that it would entail severe penalties if it should occur, and that every precaution will be used to prevent premature confinement from taking place accidentally. Religion intervenes to protect the woman with child during the latter months of her pregnancy, and shields her from the male by explicit prohibitions during the whole period in which her condition is very noticeable ; but in spite of this, even laborious work is not forbidden her.

Confinement takes place in a separate hut, in the presence of the other wives and under the exalted superintendence of aged matrons. Men are excluded. The sufferer reclines upon a mat, supported by two friends, and groans, cries, and writhes to her heart's content, while the sweat trickles in a zigzag course down her body, which is daubed with palm-oil and camwood powder. All about her are the spectators, literally cramming the hut, which is always a small one, watching curiously for the climax, chatting noisily, laughing loudly, feasting, swilling down drink, and smoking. The air is thick with the smoke of pipes and green wood, the heat is suffocating, and there is an indescribable odour of a smoke-house, a stench of victuals and human effluvia sufficient to make the strongest turn faint. At times when the patient's cries are shriller than usual everybody feels obliged to attend to the little drama which is being acted out close by,





Native Resting.



Child's Gun made of a Reed.

To face page 157.

and from the evil-smelling gloom there rises a chorus of, "Cheer up, Wanga, be brave! Push, push!" According to custom, the happy mother-to-be always complains that her time is longer in coming than she likes. There is no surgical treatment whatever, except that the two assistants exert pressure upon the sides. Finally, a general shout of triumph informs the person most interested of the appearance of the vertex, at which the exhortations are redoubled and hurry along to the climax. When the child is born care is taken not to cut the umbilical cord, and he is left lying between the legs of his mother and still attached to the placenta. The first attention is to sprinkle mother and child with a large jugful of cold water, which revives the former and causes the latter to draw a long breath with his first cry. Meanwhile gentle pressure is exerted upon the mother's abdomen until the placenta is entirely expelled, when one of the matrons takes the new-born babe and daubs his whole body with sand, sifted very fine, and then washes him with tepid water, the object of which process is to rid him entirely of his vernix caseosa. Then the mother herself takes a little piece of roughly sharpened wood and cuts the umbilical cord, which is not tied, but merely lifted and held in position on the abdomen by a fibre knotted into a girdle around the body.

No repose is prescribed for the mother, nor any special care, save exemption from very hard work during the first few days which follow. She does not keep her bed for a moment, but simply binds her abdomen tightly and, in certain tribes, anoints her entire body with camwood ointment.

The reasons which make criminal abortion an offence apply to infanticide also, and here, too, maternal love is a stronger guarantee for the tiny creature's frail life than even the father's self-interest. Nevertheless, it appears that in certain districts, especially among

the Fans, children who are born weak or crippled are put to death, as well as one of each pair of twins. Voluntary selection is not necessary for the preservation of racial purity, since the hardships of savage life, its rough habits, and the climatic inclemencies which attack these frail and defenceless beings are enough to eliminate the weak. In Africa the mother is a child's only possible nurse, and if she dies or has a serious illness the baby is almost certainly fated to expire. Unquestionably, it is this brutal neglect which makes congenital defects such as gibbosity, lameness, blindness, and idiocy almost impossible to find. During my long career in the Congo I met only one deaf man, who was, however, remarkably intelligent, one idiotic woman, and one person who had a very slight spinal curvature.

We may note here that the child often has a trifling weakness for several years after its birth, in the shape of an umbilical hernia, which is sometimes very prominent and results from neglect to tie the placental cord. Eventually this entails no discomfort, for the hernia disappears of itself, and after puberty we find no trace of it.

## 2. CHILDHOOD.

The new-born child is immediately provided with the most varied assortment of amulets. He has shells fastened to his girdle by a fibre, small sacks hung about his neck, and rags containing various drugs are knotted around his wrists and ankles. This apparatus is intended to secure him from illness and witchcraft, which are one and the same thing ; but, from our point of view, it has the serious disadvantage of cramping him, impairing his circulation, and promoting uncleanness.

Apart from these articles he has no dress, no linen, no swaddling-bands, no cap, but is quite nude. He cases himself wherever he happens to be, either on



the ground, in his mother's arms, or on her back, and she merely wipes herself dry.

The mother never leaves her child, but places him near her on a mat when she prepares the family dinner or pounds the manioc paste, though generally she carries him seated astride her loins, with one leg across each, while a broad band of leather or beaten bark or plaited fibres confines him below the hips and behind the back, and is then knotted around the mother's breasts. Thenceforth she does not trouble about her offspring, but attends to her wifely duties, stoops, stands erect, comes and goes, wields the axe, the great wooden pestle, or the roller for milling grain, while the child sleeps on undisturbed, pressed against her back and nodding his head violently in all directions. Sometimes whole nights of dancing are spent in this manner ; the child is shaken by the rhythmic steps of the dancer and the swaying of her back, and still his deep slumber is not in the least disturbed. When a baby is merely carried from one place to another he is usually set astride the mother's hip, and her right arm passes behind his back and under his armpits.

I should not venture to assert that cleanliness is scrupulously practised in all districts, for Negroes may be divided into clean tribes and 'dirty' ones. Those who dwell on the great watercourses may generally be placed in the first class, and no doubt owe this virtue to their natural occupations as canoeists and fishermen. The Natives of districts which contain unnavigable rivers, either large or small, are, on the contrary, generally in a permanent state of filth, skin disease, and incurable sores. The former tribes wash their babies in tepid water morning and evening, and make them share in the general bath which the whole village takes in running water during the hottest part of the day. The latter teach their offspring a horror of the watery element, and do no more than anoint the little ones with their precious ointment of palm-

oil and camwood, after which they let them roll at their ease in the dust and vermin, whence results a mixture that grows rancid on the skin, dries, attracts insects, causes itching, and turns the slightest scratch into an ulcer.

Lactation lasts a very long time. Its average duration is two years, but it has been known to be protracted up to six. We must, however, understand the real meaning of the word "lactation," for there is no question of an exclusive milk diet lasting all this time. I do not know at what approximate period coarse food begins to be administered, but I am convinced that meat, smoked fish, and, above all, manioc are given the child very early. It is undoubtedly due to this untimely nourishment and to the athrepsia which it occasions that we must ascribe the over-development of the abdomen in most of the young children, the etiolated appearance of many of them, and the high rate of infant mortality. Thus from the beginning of life the native regimen provides a class of puny individuals who either succumb to their weakness at the outset or are left to the mercy of climacteric changes, and furnish a soil which is marvellously well suited to the multiplication of bacteria, when the first breeze of contagion sweeps across the country. They are beings unsuited to sustained activity, and are barely capable of working in a sluggish, unintelligent, and desultory fashion. A slight exertion exhausts them and rapidly induces a dangerous state of depression. Athrepsia and its immediate or deferred results, improper nourishment, uncleanness, superstitious practices, and unskilled nursing are powerful selective agents, under whose sway at the end of a few years only those individuals can survive who are the least shaken in health by the deadly hygiene of their childhood.

In organized society, even such as is in a state of barbarism intermediate between savage life and civilization, the name is the distinctive sign of human personality ; it is the spoken or written token which, in their intercourse and agreements, distinguishes each citizen from his fellows. It involves the designation of the individual's nationality, tribe, clan, filial relationship, and sex, and assumes the existence of conscious and continuous volition from birth to death, implying acts and responsibilities, rights and duties in the one who bears it. Like any other institution, its existence depends on its usefulness. Now, among the African Negroes physical personality alone is considered, for their social personality is vague and unsettled, not attached to an individual, but depending upon his circumstances and varying according to them. Hence the name is only a temporary designation, subject to the whims of men and to chance happenings, and transforming itself in accordance with the different periods of a person's life and the changes in his destiny.

Therefore the act of giving a name at birth must not be thought of as either binding or definitive. The idea is simply to give the new-born babe a label which will distinguish him for the time being from his brothers and sisters. The choice of the name is not the privilege of any special person, but results from a sort of mutual assent of all the connections. There are no patronymics, and the vocabulary of personal names in ordinary use is very limited, for in each separate tribe and language their number does not exceed twenty or thirty at the most, and they often apply to both sexes equally. Hence it results that homonyms are legion in one and the same district, and that they occasion endless confusion in regard to the persons involved. Herein lies one of the greatest difficulties which European civilization has encountered in Equatorial Africa, for as there are no distinctive names, no public records are possible, and one is in the presence

of a confused mass in which float individualities which are like phantoms and are as changeable and fleeting as mist.

A certain number of native names have no known meaning, while others awaken either poetic or commonplace ideas, such as dawn, virginity, storm, leaf, manioc, coverlet, fish, elephant, leopard, gorilla, crocodile, hog, etc. Often a special prefix changes the root of a common name to a personal name. On the Middle and Lower Congo the prefixes *mo* and *ma* are the characteristic signs of this transformation. Sometimes the name given to a child is inspired by some remarkable event which coincided with its birth. Its name may signify that the baby is one of twins, that it was born in a foreign village, or when a palaver took place, or when some important personage passed by. In this way many Europeans, especially officials, have unwittingly become godfathers to young Negroes whom they have never known or even seen. I found the name of M. de Brazza, distorted into *Biraza* or *Birazar*, in several places. M. Dolisie was utilized to baptize a few *Lolosis*, and other babies were tricked out with the nickname of *katemanda*, a corruption of the word "commandant," which is the term employed by the Natives to designate governors of stations and administrators. I must again remark that these chance names are not permanent, but disappear in the course of a few years, and are replaced by others which are more or less definitive.

The child, being set on the ground, quite nude, tumbles about with perfect freedom ; he crawls, creeps on all-fours, and one day ventures to stand erect and attempts to take a few steps, for he always teaches himself to walk. Sometimes at nightfall the father or mother will sit upon a stool or portable bed before the hearth, and will hold him under the arms and jump him up and down, exciting his laughter and imitating his lisping baby-talk to divert him.

He learns to speak by imitation alone, without requiring any instruction, for all Negroes have great facility for languages. Black babies, like European ones, are distinguished for their indistinct speech, their blundering pronunciation, and the same sort of mistakes in the choice of their words and in syntax.

The moulding of the future member of Negro society is a triumph of naturist training. He grows up in perfect independence, in the midst of the village ; nor has he other masters than the whims of his elders and relatives, the cuffs of those who are stronger than himself, his own malice towards those who are weaker, and the force of circumstances. There is no trace of systematic instruction, and his initiation into life is limited to imitation of older and wiser persons. It is only among the Fans that we find a few curious oral traditions in the form of often fabulous tales and narratives concerning the noble deeds of their ancestors.

Like the young of all the animal and human world, and in spite of his big head and enormous stomach, the young Negro is pleasing, frolicsome, artless, and full of merriment and playfulness. There is grace in his blundering movements and walk ; his large black eyes are soft and trusting ; he has not a malicious disposition, but is rather affectionate and docile. When not sleeping or eating he spends his time in play, which is childhood's great practical school ; for play is only a miniature attempt at, and a childish imitation of, the actions performed in adult life. By playing with its mother's tail the lion whelp learns to watch and capture its prey, the little girl serves the apprenticeship to her maternal functions by playing with her doll, while the young lad's violent games lay the foundation of a future manly constitution and virile mind. In the same way games are a foreshadowing, a mimicry of hunting, fishing, or war to the young Negro, who has a very keen instinct for imitation. Troops of boys busy themselves in capturing small animals ; they

construct traps and make miniature bows, and sometimes one of them will roll across the village square a big globular fruit, which the other boys try to hit with thin, pointed rods, used like javelins, as they stand in line along its course.

But if the Black child equals the White one in his spirit of imitation, he does not bring to his games the enthusiasm and, above all, the vivid imagination of his European rival. The latter lives his games. The little girl imagines that she is actually a housekeeper or mamma. The little boy is a flesh-and-blood soldier or brigand, and puts such spirit into prisoner's base or a game of ball that he is momentarily transformed into a real enemy of the opposite camp. The young Negro imitates but does not originate; nor does he, like the White child, give life to the pieces which he plays. Preoccupations of a material nature take possession of him *a teneris unguiculis* and never leave him more. Living is the most important business, and in these primitive social bodies the anxiety about life itself plagues man so unceasingly that fancy has no spot where it may rove. The young European, sheltered in the family circle, is not abandoned to his own strength until he is almost grown, but the Negro is goaded by Fate from his birth. He comes into the world a practical being, and leaves it without ever having had a glimpse of the fair and poetic mirages of childhood's fancy. Before he is six years old he is going about with his mother, carrying his own small burden in the shape of a few cakes of manioc paste. More than once I have witnessed the pitiful sight of a mere baby cooking his solitary dinner in an old jam tin over a wretched fire.

This elementary training—or if one prefers, this lack of all training—is the best preparation for life in such an unorganized society. As the boy and girl grow in strength and stature they gradually come to share in the labours of the community. The boy goes hunt-

ing and fishing with the men, and paddles the canoe in unison with them. The girl helps her father's wives to fetch wood and water, to cook, and keep the household going. In several tribes, especially among the Fans, we have seen that at an early age she leaves the village of her birth for that of her future husband, where she finishes her training under the supervision of the latter's family.

### 3. PUBERTY.

The transition period which connects childhood with man's estate marks an epoch in human life, and is considered particularly important by primitive man. I have nothing to say of its symptoms and physiology which the reader does not know already, and for further detail I recommend him to the special treatises on this subject, where he will find particular mention of the true fact that races living in hot countries are more precocious than those who inhabit temperate or cold climates. In regard to Africans who live on the Equator we must practically limit ourselves to this general statement, for it cannot be verified with any precision, owing to our ignorance of their ages. An average estimate would indicate that the courses make their appearance in the young girl when she is from ten to twelve years of age ; but the signs of puberty in the boy—deepening of the voice, appearance of the pubic pile, consolidation of the character, and sexual awakening—are all so gradual in their manifestation that the observer cannot assign them any exact time.

There is another peculiarity of Negro social life which contributes greatly to lead one astray. I mean the close promiscuity in which the Natives spend their nights, lolling in confusion upon mats spread on the ground around the hearth. From earliest childhood both boys and girls are initiated into the nocturnal revels of their parents and elders by the very fact of

living with them. They soon learn to consider the reproductive functions as a law of their nature, which no moral law as yet opposes, and among the most retrograde of these savages there is little "modesty," as we understand it, or none whatever.

What takes place at night on the mat shared by all, among the groups of sleeping men and women who lie pressed close together to keep out the damp chill of the dawn? One may imagine everything, and, as a matter of fact, everything does happen. There is no doubt whatever that the boy plays at precocious embraces and that the girl early destroys the physical signs of her virginity. It all appears to them the very simplest thing in the world. Why should they think of the future? Why consider the dangers to their health? Such are possible, even probable; but the Negro's thoughtless and superficial nature is not capable of perceiving them. As for morality—there is none in the Black Man's country, and the reader now knows that pregnancies which precede marriage are not only not held to be crimes, but are considered excellent certificates of fitness for matrimony, and this in itself is almost an encouragement to a premature initiation into sexual life.

The laxity of morals in ordinary normal life would seem to leave no place for perversions of the sexual instinct. Onanism and sodomy are naturally the result of isolation, long journeys, or the lack of women. The former is well known to exist everywhere. Homosexualism is practised in various localities, but I am inclined to think that it is not a spontaneous local growth, for it seems to me more likely to have been imported by foreigners—by Europeans on the West Coast and by Semites towards the east.

In this connection we must note the regrettable consequences entailed by the expatriation and wholesale deportation of labourers and porters. Large numbers of males are thus removed from the villages and



delivered over to the fallacious resources of sexual vice, while the women who are left without husbands give themselves up to sexual perversions and debauch. Finally, when the men return to their homes they are exhausted by overwork and privations and are incapable of begetting any but degenerate offspring.

The awakening of the reproductive functions is considered by the African Negro as a new birth, the dawning of a personality distinct from that of childhood. Up to that time the boy is regarded as blended with his father's existence, but after puberty he becomes a new individual.

In a general way the Natives hold that every serious event in physical life is equivalent to death followed by resurrection. When a man recovers from an illness, or escapes some peril to his life, he is considered in popular parlance to "have made a new skin." He is no longer the same person: nominally he is some one else, and this resurrected individual often changes his name in order to emphasize the fact that he is another man. The transition from childhood to manhood is a similar renewal which various customs substantiate as a true and perfect metamorphosis.<sup>1</sup>

To begin with, the person concerned appears clothed from this time on—at least, as much so as local fashions permit—and he changes his name. In certain tribes the new name is chosen arbitrarily, while in others it follows a rule. In the latter case the name of childhood and youth must correspond, such and such a name succeeding with mathematical certainty to such and such others, save for subsequent modifications, which, as I have explained before, may be due to a personal whim or to some chance circumstance. Moreover, various practices and ceremonies surround this entrance into the new life, for it is a sort of initiation, in a vaguely religious form, and may consist variously

<sup>1</sup> See p. 325.

of antics, instruction, advice, and admission into a sort of college or association. I shall not lay stress here upon these interesting points, which will add to the clearness and just proportions of this investigation by being placed under the chapter on Religion.

From what little the Negroes are willing to tell us, we catch glimpses of the fact that the secret ceremonial of puberty must consist of certain tricks and jugglery whose pretext is initiation into the mysteries of procreation. In the case of the girl the interposition is very thorough, for in many districts she is deflowered—should it still require to be done—by means of suitable instruments. This preparation for nubility is accompanied and followed by ceremonies and festivities which are probably inspired by an idea of facilitating conception, and again show the constant anxiety about maternity which I have pointed out several times before.

Circumcision, which occurs in many districts, certainly has a similar object when practised on the male. Experienced old persons no doubt know the possible complications of phimosis, although the premature practices of early youth may perhaps be of a nature to cause progressive enlargement. However, circumcision is not in general use among all tribes; some are ignorant of it, others appear to perform it only upon occasion, for surgical reasons, so to speak, and without any ostentation, while others, again, honour it by great ceremonies and public festivals. The person who has undergone this operation lives alone until he is completely healed, and during this time wears a special dress, whose essential portion consists of a sort of palm-leaf skirt.

I am inclined to think (though I have no exact information on this point) that circumcision is more strictly and constantly practised among the tribes of the interior than those of the West Coast, where, according to all indications, it flourished in olden times, but ended by falling into disuse under the influence of Christianity.

Even the age at which circumcision takes place is not fixed. In one locality it occurs a day or two after birth, while in another, as is more frequently the case, it is not performed until the child is ten or fifteen years old and has reached the age of puberty, or it may even take place later.

Finally, in earliest childhood there are practised those tattooings and mutilations which are to be both the individual's distinctive tribal mark and, as it were, his ticket of identification. They are extremely dissimilar, and include perforation of the nasal septum, and of the nostrils, of the lips, of the lobe, the concha, or the edge of the ear, deep incisions or scarifications in the forehead, the cheeks, the chest, stomach, and arms, and depilation of the eyelashes and eyebrows. The lower limbs and the back are spared. Introduction of colouring matter into the incisions is rare, for the result desired is not so much an indelible design, which moreover would not contrast with the black background of the skin, but rather the production of cicatrices, especially of prominent ones. In order to secure this prominence the tribes of certain districts detach a bit of skin, which is then raised and held by a pellet of tow until the wound has healed. Such is the process by which the dandies of the Upper Ubangi and the Equatorial Congo obtain, in the first case, the three or four pear-shaped bits of flesh that adorn their foreheads, and, in the latter instance, a prominent crest which gives them a fierce expression. Into the perforation of the lips they insert either long quartz crystals<sup>1</sup> or broad wooden or ivory disks, which transform the mouth into the shape of a duck's bill.<sup>2</sup> In the centre of Africa<sup>3</sup> the two lips are edged with close rows of copper rings, while in other cases a long porcupine quill or a string of beads passes through the nasal septum.<sup>4</sup> Small sticks of wood, nails, and cartridge-cases are

<sup>1</sup> Langwasis.

<sup>2</sup> Dakwas.

<sup>3</sup> Gabus.

<sup>4</sup> Fan, Bosyeba

passed through the alæ of the nose.<sup>1</sup> The ala of the ear is edged with rings, and its lobe is distended by large disks which cause it to hang down to the shoulders.<sup>2</sup>

Men of all nations instinctively adapt their attire to their character. Mathematicians and scholars neglect the arrangement of their hair, and are unaware of the fashionable cut in beards ; an old military man's hair is as bristly as his disposition is brusque ; and love-locks and curls would not become the lawyer or the prelate. The frivolity of one man and the sedateness or vulgar instincts of another proportion the length of their hair, guide the razor, determine the quantity of pomade, and regulate their choice of a perfume. Every one dresses his head according to his own nature, thus making quite an open display of his secret characteristics, inclinations, and capacities ; and, like civilized man, the Africans deliberately stamp the fleur-de-lis of their savage nature and barbaric tastes upon their foreheads. It is their ambition to appear formidable, to be like some animal or other, and to raise themselves in the sight of their fellows by strange or terrifying ornaments.

Among certain tribes whose manners and customs are savage the initiation into man's estate entails the development of the youth's warlike instincts and the hardening of his sensibility to pain. The Fans, like modern Spartans, demand contempt of suffering in the candidate, who is subjected to various tests, must bear discomfort and even pain without wincing, must walk on pebbles and crushed palm-nuts, and must pass naked through thorny thickets. If he allows a murmur to escape him, if he cannot conquer his reflexes, he will see himself exposed to the derision and insults of the crowd, and by the fair sex he will be subjected to the most humiliating jests in a style whose licence approaches ribaldry, for as far as modesty goes the

<sup>1</sup> Kakas.

<sup>2</sup> Yakomas.

African languages rival Latin in their free-and-easy qualities.

#### 4. ADULT AGE.

When he has reached puberty the neophyte—I had almost said the “new-born,” in conformity with the local notion—takes his place among the men of the tribe ; he is invested with the prerogatives and duties of a citizen, and enters in earnest upon his social rôle.

I must repeat that the quite analogical expressions which I am obliged to use here for the sake of clearness must not be looked upon as referring in any sense to systematic and definite legislation, or to the observance of laws and rules, for of such there is not the merest shadow of any tradition, either clearly transmitted by oral teachings or latent in the popular consciousness. Let me say once more that all Native customs are a confused blend of natural phenomena and of social obligations, which are mostly not understood by the people who submit to them, and which for this very reason are all the more deeply rooted and immovable. Lovers of hypothesis have a free field here. But in the absence of any monuments of the past, and of any remains either oral, written, or carved, who can demonstrate logically whether the shapeless mass of these uncivilized practices is a spontaneous product of the Negro mind in the depth of its original environment, and that we are here face to face, in a way, with the natural genesis of the earliest social and religious concepts of humanity, such as they arose sporadically at a great many points on the globe, or whether we are to see in it only the degraded, apish imitation of peoples who were already advanced in civilization, and whom these savages adjoined at some remote period before their dispersion over the whole of Tropical Africa?

The analysis of any complex subject has the tremendous disadvantage of distorting it and of causing the proportions of the whole to be lost sight of, and although in the present work I endeavour by constant repetitions, which the reader no doubt finds tiresome, to weld every detail snugly to the whole, of which it is but one of innumerable elements, still, I sometimes feel that, as in the case of a dissected body, whose organs are scattered about in order to permit of their separate examination, the connections which once existed between them cease to be evident. Their relations, their influences upon one another, and their complicated reactions have disappeared, and the conception of unity, which alone constitutes life, has dissolved in the general disintegration. Hence I must detach the reader from his involuntary tendency to compare everything with himself, and must draw his attention to the fact that the individual whom we are studying is a being very different from him, very retrograde, and obedient to the necessities of both internal and external conditions which are extremely unlike his own. I grant that the Native's concepts and his manners and customs are strange—extraneous, in the old sense of the word—but yet they are logical under the highly complex aggregate of conditions enveloping the portion of humanity which I am here investigating, and are absurd only if we set them suddenly and without preparation in the field of our European ideas. In the Native environment they are in their proper setting, and the real absurdity is that of those persons who would fain obliterate at a stroke conditions which are the work of the centuries without taking into account the manifold circumstances which make them necessary. The changes which take place among these primitive tribes when they come into contact with Europeans are not the result of demolition and subsequent reconstruction, but of adaptation and caricature.

Having said so much in regard to the general nature

of our subject, we will now resume our consideration of the young Negro when he enters man's estate.

Nubility, as we see, confers the right to participate in the life of the community, and from this time on the young man has a voice in all discussions ; he gives his opinion and may enforce it if he has the natural gift of persuasion, influence, strength of character, a talent for eloquence, or the authority due to an assured position. Now we realize the prestige which devolves upon the Negro from his quality as head of a family, and by virtue of the number of his wives, children, and clients. All these persons, who originate in him and are attached to him, who are at once his subjects and his masters, and who are bound to him by ties of mutual advantage, constitute his power, his wealth—in the signification which I have given to this word—and increase his preponderant influence in the tribe.

His daily life is simple, and allows of few vicissitudes. He wakes at the first glimmer of daylight. We all know that in the tropics the sun remains above the horizon from about six o'clock in the morning to six in the evening, and that the twilight is very short. At about half-past five in the morning the temperature reaches the lowest point of the twenty-four hours, and the chill is damp and disagreeable ; but as soon as the sun appears there is an instant which is really delightful, though extremely evanescent. The nocturnal mists roll away and dissolve in the air, which takes on more and more heat, while shreds of damp vapour remain caught in the topmost branches of the giant forest trees. Everywhere, in the grass, the copse, and the mystery of the deep branches, there is a sudden awakening of all Nature, glad to shake off the morning dews. The first rays of the sun supple limbs which are benumbed by sleep and cold. Life makes haste to revive and to disport itself, for one hour later the oppressive heat will have sent Nature off into another

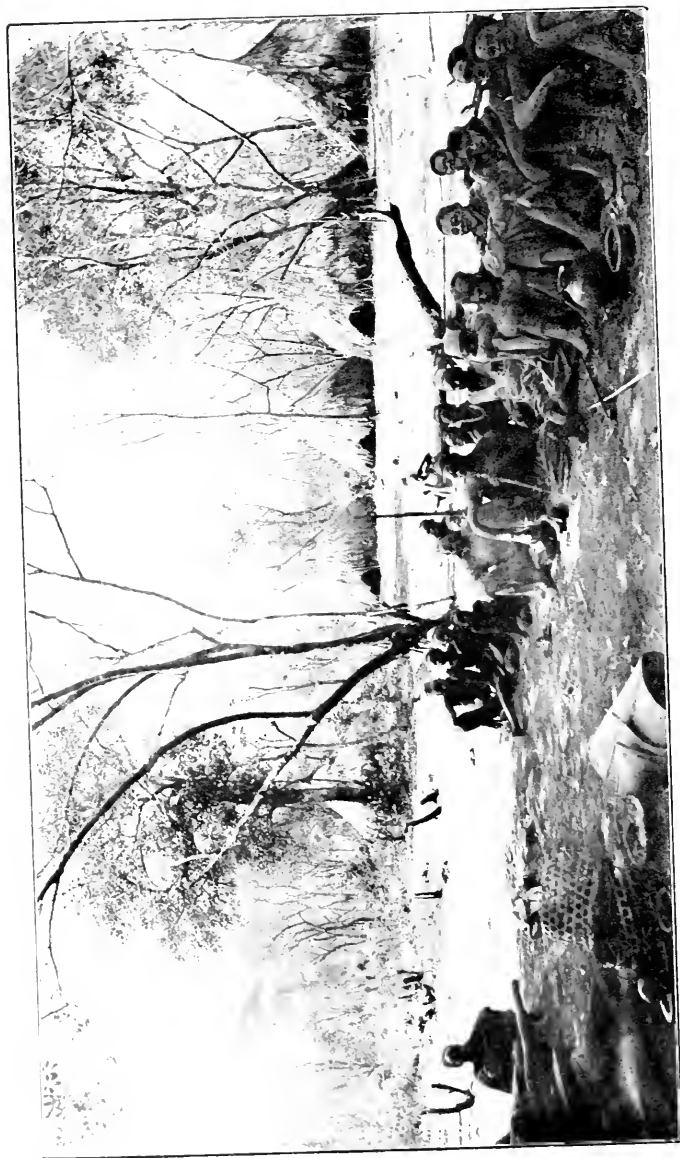
doze. The Black Man whom we are following bends double, and hastily passes through the low and narrow doorway of his hut. He stretches, savours the mildness of the warm air, and inhales the wild emanations of the forest. It is the most exotic sensation imaginable, and full of sensual delight. The sweet scent of musk, the acrid odour of burnt grass, the unwholesome miasmas of the swamp, the heady exhalations from flowers and verdure, the nauseous insipidity of rotting matter, the animal and vegetable effluvia of a fierce and exuberant vitality, are all triturerated, blended, melted in the universal crucible which is a perfidious enemy to man's health, but so seductive that it leaves in him who has once tasted it the memory of I know not what inebriating and voluptuous charm, as though he had bathed in liquid life.

No matter how barbarous and narrow the Negro's mind may be, he is not without a sensation of peace and relaxation, for he feels that night, as it glides away in the west, carries the phantoms along with it, and behold, here is the day, making all things visible, and putting to flight the ghosts of the departed, the dismal spirits, and fear. Still, one never knows what may happen, and it is prudent to fortify himself against malign influences by his amulets, and by lines of ashes or coloured earths drawn around his eyes, upon his temples, down his arms, and on his chest. After this he partakes of a slight repast.

The most suitable time for heavy work, such as the felling of trees and the building of huts, is the morning, during which the heat is not very great. These are the only tasks, among those which are somewhat laborious, to which the man applies himself. Moreover, they occur only at long intervals, when a village is built or enlarged. All other tasks, as we know, such as cultivating the plantations, weeding, harvesting, portage, baking of manioc bread, and cooking, are the woman's exclusive occupation.







A CAMP ON THE BANKS OF THE SUE.

Plate X.

To face page 175.

At noon there is a meal, which is followed by a general bath in midstream among the tribes who live on the banks of the great watercourses. For an hour they indulge in shouts, mirth, capers, the maddest frolics and most extravagant pranks, and then wash their waistcloths, bowls, and calabashes.

Afterwards, during the great heat of the day, every one takes a siesta, either in the hut, in the shadow of the trees, under a straw canopy, or in the palaver house. In the latter, which is reserved for the exclusive use of the sterner sex, our man finishes his day in gossip, discussions, shouts, wrangling, drinking, and smoking. Stretched at soft ease upon a little sofa of palm-wood laths, or seated on the ground and supporting his back by a branch shaped like a tripod, he is perfectly happy and chatters away to his heart's content, while the pipe goes round from mouth to mouth. The only trouble which he deigns to take is to drive off, by means of a little brush made for the purpose, the swarms of flies which are attracted by the mixture of sweat, rancid oil, and filth that forms continents, lakes, and rivers upon his body. There he steeps, with the rest of the company, in an acrid stench of sweat, tobacco, and victuals. These palavers are his happiness and delight, with their heavy and sickening atmosphere, their blissful *dolce far niente*, enlivened by tales, jests, discussions of interesting matters, and frivolous remarks.

When the sun, reddened by the dense vapours which it has drawn from the earth, the swamps, and the woods, begins to hide behind the great trees, the Native reappears in the open air, and his evening meal is made ready while he dawdles about once more, plays with his children, and talks over the events of the day.

After dinner, all Natives go to bed at once, or, if there is a moon, they dance. In fact, one cannot sit motionless and inactive in these parts and endure the tormenting mosquitoes and the evening dews, which

follow close upon the setting of the sun. Unless one is stirring he must needs seek shelter in his hut against cold and the stinging insects. The door is closed by means of a mat, the fire is built up, and the thick smoke which rises from the damp wood drives away winged pests as well as may be. Europeans suffocate in this rarefied air, which grips the throat and makes the eyes ache until they water, which grows thicker and thicker from the sublimated effluvia of dried fish, manioc, sauces, dogs, and, last of all, human beings, who are all filthy and wallowing in vile promiscuity.

The division of time which I have just sketched is a mere outline, as the reader will have understood already, for the Negro has no fixed rule for this or anything else. His occupations are not at all regular, for, like the animals, he procures the necessities of life when the need of doing so makes itself felt, or when circumstances permit. One morning he fasts, because he has nothing to eat, but in the evening, if plenty has knocked at his door meanwhile, he gorges until he gets indigestion, and without any thought of the morrow. If the previous night has been passed in dancing or idle talk, and there should come a quiet moment during the day, you will see him rolled up in some corner like a dog, and plunged in slumber so deep that nothing but an energetic cuff can bring him out of it, and then he will be but a poor, dazed, and utterly stupefied creature.

Save for errors and imperfections of judgment, I believe that the preceding picture represents the daily, normal life of the African Negro as correctly as the average of several related quantities recalls each one of them separately. We have seen, or shall see, as this work proceeds, the events which diversify the monotonous succession of his days.

## 5. OLD AGE.

The alternatives of good and evil fortune, which are the lot of mankind of every colour, bring the Negro

to speedy maturity and then to a premature death. Should his lucky star enable him to elude the numerous sources of economic and bodily disaster which constantly assail him, he finds himself at about forty years of age the head of a family and a man of influence, surrounded by male and female vassals. Death seldom permits him to enjoy these good things many years, for the Negro is short-lived.

Why are so few old men to be seen among these tribes? During more than twenty years I never knew more than four or five who could have been considered

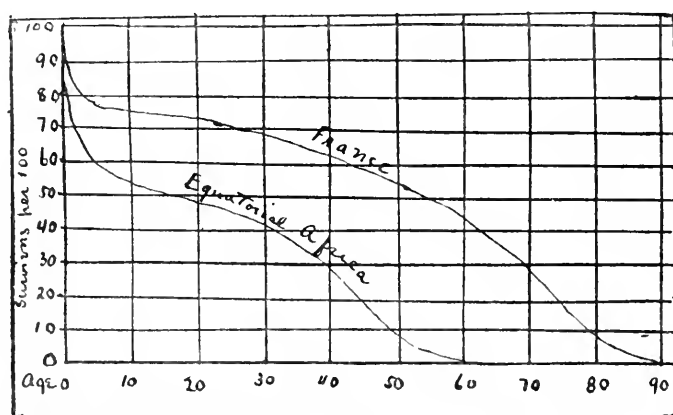


FIG. 2.—Comparative Mortality in Equatorial Africa and in France.

sixty-five or seventy years of age, and even persons who are presumably from fifty to sixty years old are uncommon. I know several persons whom I remember as children or very young men, that is to say at a period when one may guess even a Negro's age without too much likelihood of error, and who now, at the age of thirty-five or forty, already exhibit signs of premature decrepitude.

The reader will easily realize that the present condition of the European occupation and the wandering habits of these tribes render any attempts at statistics

illusory, especially such as have to do with mortality. All that one can do is to make a rough estimate, in travelling through the country, of the proportion of individuals of different ages. It is a mere approximation, but it must satisfy us, for lack of anything better. I have represented this impression, which is quite a personal one, in the diagram on p. 177 (Fig. 2), and have at the same time brought it into line with the data furnished for France by the *Annuaire du Bureau des Longitudes*.

According to this curve it seems that fully half the population disappears from the stage of the African world before the twentieth year. After the severe selection exercised in youth, the more robust survivors hold their ground until they are forty or forty-five years of age. Then the death-rate increases once more, and again it is higher in individuals who are depleted from various causes which I shall enumerate presently. Finally, the losses increase enormously, as decay makes man less able to participate in the life of society, and in consequence bans him from fellowship with the young and strong.

If my diagram represents the curve of human life in Tropical Africa with perfect accuracy, the average length of this life should be from twelve to fifteen years, and according to my estimate this figure seems to correspond fairly well to the true state of affairs.

There are many causes of this enormous mortality, but analysis will show that the chief ones are only two : homicide in all forms and disease. Neither crimes nor accidents furnish the largest tribute to death, nor is war very sanguinary ; for if the Natives are warlike in some districts, in others their natures are mild and kind. In one place there may be the sort of war where captives are sold or eaten, where villages are surprised and lone individuals are kidnapped. In another place, however, the Natives may make timid surprise attacks, may commit cowardly assassinations in the hidden depths of

the corpses, and their deeds of arms may end, after very long-drawn-out hostilities, merely in the disappearance of one or two poor devils. Thus war does not perceptibly decrease the population on an average.

Disease furnishes the largest quota of victims. The everyday pathology of Negro Africa revolves around a very limited nucleus of affections, such as the various cutaneous diseases, gastro-enteric disturbances, broncho-pneumonia, small-pox, and, during the last few years, sleeping-sickness. But, in addition to giving each of these diseases its due noxious value, let us take one more step and ask ourselves why they create such ravages among the Natives. This, of course, brings up the question of the physiological soil prepared for them and the conditions of life which they encounter. I have spoken so repeatedly of the filth in which these Natives wallow, of their heedlessness, fatalism, and utter negligence, that no doubt of these matters can remain in the reader's mind. Those who are strongest and the most favoured by Fate alone triumph over the repeated ordeals to which they are subjected during the course of their lives. In childhood the premature ingestion of heavy, coarse, and dirty ingredients begins the enfeeblement of the constitution, and the dietetic regimen of youth and adult age continues the work. Their staple foods consist of starchy substances, some of which are thick and glutinous, like manioc, while others, such as millet, contain a very low proportion of nutritive elements in comparison with the parts which are not susceptible of assimilation. Even the large banana,<sup>1</sup> so much used in the forest districts, cannot be considered a rich foodstuff, for, though a relatively large quantity of it may be consumed by man, yet he will not find in it more than a comparatively small portion of actual food.

Beyond this dietetic basis, everything is mere shift

<sup>1</sup> I mean the plantain (*Musa paradisiaca*), not the sweet or Chinese banana.

and luck, where days of superfluity, when men gorge, alternate with days of dearth, when the manioc and bananas have only a little palm-oil to season them.

According to a celebrated formula, which in days gone by melted many a person of sensitive imagination, the Negro lives on "the spontaneous products of Nature." As a matter of fact, however, he slowly starves to death, and is utterly incapable of extricating himself from his destitution by his own initiative. Diseases arising from an excess of nutrition are unknown in these lands, as we may understand, and the whole of pathology has to do with complaints arising from debility and inanition.

Leaving the dietetic section of African hygiene, let us now note the Native's insufficient protection against external agencies : he has rudimentary clothing or none at all ; his hut is low, confined, smoky, and damp, and he suffers much encumbrance of humanity during sleep. We must also consider that a very important part of his troubles is due to nights spent out of doors and in the penetrating morning dew, as well as to the poisonous, incessant persecution of clouds of insects, both those which sting and those which do not, all of which are really the ferocious animals of these lands, and almost the only ones that are formidable. Thus we realize that a Negro must have exceptional good fortune and a particularly robust constitution in order to reach old age over a path strewn with so many perils. Happy the man who, when weakened by age and become infirm and incapable of providing for his own needs, and still less capable of participating in public life, is not forsaken by all, made the object of public contempt, doomed to perish of want, or even killed to make shorter work of him ! The halo of respect which surrounds a great chief, and a sort of superstitious veneration which is accorded him, can alone occasionally protect the last days of his life and awaken a glimmer of devotion in those who surround him. I knew two



cases of this sort. One was an Atyo chief near Brazzaville ; he must have been a septuagenarian, had lost all his teeth, and a double cataract had made him totally blind. His wives continued to care for his person and attended to the satisfaction of his wants ; they kept him comparatively clean, anointed him with their precious mixture of palm-oil and camwood, and dressed his hair in the round pad which is traditional in that district. The other was an old chief of Wesso, who had long since retired from the conduct of public business, and was reduced by feebleness to a state of the most complete inactivity, so that he lay quite nude in a dark and narrow hovel, in which a little fire was kept burning for him and in which he took his food.

## 6. DEATH.

The Native of our sketch has now arrived at the end of his life's journey. It is not my plan to describe the burial ceremonies, which are complicated in detail, and which, moreover, vary according to district. It will be enough for me to give a general idea of them.

Interment is the usual way in which to dispose of the dead, the pomp being graduated according to the importance and dignity of the deceased, and sinking to nothing in the case of a man of the lower classes. Common folk are removed in any way permitted by circumstances. In some districts they are eaten, which is clear gain, while elsewhere they are thrown into the river or left lying on the ground in some remote spot. Respect for the chief, however, continues to be observed after his death. In districts where manners have already become refined, the remains of the deceased notable are wrapped in mats and waistcloths until a huge cylinder is formed which is about a yard in diameter and two yards high. Some tribes bury the body thus, while others<sup>1</sup> let it slowly smoke in this sort of tower, over a

<sup>1</sup> Atyo.

hole dug in the ground, where a little fire of green wood is kept burning, and after a certain number of days they lower the whole into a large grave. Burial often takes place in the village itself, which is then abandoned by its inhabitants. The Natives of the Middle Congo<sup>1</sup> do not fail to give the deceased a number of slaves in accordance with his high rank when alive, so that they may wait upon him and make life pleasant for him in the other world. Stones and certain favourite articles of the deceased are often placed upon the tomb, for thanks to these delicate attentions it is supposed that the dead man's soul will not be tempted to return to earth and torment the living.

Many of these customs, especially the more cruel ones, are rapidly disappearing, and if human sacrifices still take place in localities which are the most remote from our stations, the fact is kept profoundly secret. Tombs are everywhere concealed far from the roads which we and our men frequent, and even on the Lower Congo we no longer find, as we used to do several years ago, the little tumulus surrounded by a few stones and decorated with a hat, a red umbrella, and several earthenware basins and jugs, which marked the last home of a great chief. The Natives long ago got into the habit of breaking these objects, in order to protect them from the rapacity of our caravan porters, for the autochthones evinced a profound respect for these mortuary depositories and piously made a point of not disturbing them.

<sup>1</sup> Bobangi, etc.

## PART SECOND

### *THE VILLAGE*

#### 1. SOCIAL ORGANISMS HIGHER THAN THE BI-SEXUAL COUPLE.

I HAVE been describing the Negro family in its most complex form, which is, however, also its commonest one, for the simple couple without the addition of any other members beside the children who are its normal product is a rather unusual phenomenon.

There are tribes <sup>1</sup> among whom the family—of course in its complex form—constitutes the largest social group. In such cases the tribe is made up of the sum total of a large number of analogous groups, and each family lives alone, apart from its neighbours, in small clusters of huts, which are like farms, and are surrounded by the gardens and plantations necessary to support each little community. North of the Ubangi we even find tribes who are still in the state of society where such family groups are perpetually at war with one another, where insecurity is the rule, alarms are constant, and the cooking-pot is a contingency ever present to men's minds.

At the next stage of social progress the families of the married sons unite with the parent family when lack of means or influence, or some other reason, pre-

<sup>1</sup> The Gabus.

vents them from setting up an independent establishment of their own.

At the next higher stage we see the family taking to itself voluntary members, who are a sort of "clientage" in the Latin meaning of the word. They are persons who feel their lack of talent and strength, and who offer their numerical support to some powerful patron on the understanding that he will protect their persons and guarantee the safety of their property, wives, children, and slaves. This is the beginning of mutual responsibility, the first sign of a contractual bond between an accountable authority and its voluntary subjects ; in short, it is the dawn of established government.

Subsequently groups of this sort take their places side by side, but do not mingle. As the embryo of society, the village resembles those colonies of animal life whose members, rudimentary indeed, but endowed with distinct individual life, join together to form a collective personality. There is mutual support, but no close fusion, between the component parts, which are independent of one another, and may even be enemies upon occasion, but whose feeling of mutual responsibility returns when a common danger has to be faced.

The next step leads us to a still higher stage of complexity and union. The bonds are drawn more closely between the groups whose nucleus is the family, and social unity is established under the symbol of a collective father. I do not as yet venture to utter the words "authority" and "chief," for he whom I have just called "the collective father" is still but a droll figure, a feeble and flabby personification of the community. Genuine authority, which is strong and conscious of its strength, only develops at later stages ; but then it may develop unduly, and among Negroes, who are always artlessly egotistical and pleasure-loving, it may quickly degenerate into the most cruel tyranny.

The typical village which I am now about to describe belongs to the two latter classes, that is to say, it is an association of fully developed family groups, with or without a common chief.

## 2. DEFINITION OF THE VILLAGE AND ITS CHARACTER.

The very fact that the village has continued to exist as a social institution for a fairly long period is enough to indicate that its inhabitants are not nomads. However, the sequel will show us that, as it is founded by persons of fickle disposition and is built of frail materials, such an institution is as unstable as the personality of those who create it.

It is important to state in precise terms the essential character of the Negro village.

Our European communities are animal organisms of a superior sort, whose constituent cells are constantly reproducing their kind and then eliminating themselves without destroying the individuality of the whole. They are centres of public interests, *foci* of business affairs which multitudes of private interests are constantly crossing, tarrying for a longer or shorter period, or just whizzing past like a flash of lightning. But the village, or the city of our civilized countries, continues to exist in time and space, and is like an abstract personality, but a very real one, the stability of which depends on external circumstances that are sometimes political, but nearly always geographical.

The life of the Negro village, on the contrary, is bound up in one person. It is created by one man and for one man, and its birth, development, and death are copied from the phases of its founder's existence. It comes into being by his initiative, and with him it disappears, like a protozoan which is born and afterwards utterly destroyed. This peculiarity is the natural consequence of the fact that the village is merely the shelter of a more or less complex family, and of the

other fact that the family exists and subsists only by the interest which one man takes in it, and by the benefit which it confers upon this man ; so that when the cord is once broken, the whole bundle falls to pieces. There are apparent exceptions to this rule, for some places which derive importance from their geographical position are the permanent seats of collections of villages ; but one must not be deceived by this. These instances may apparently indicate a first step in the direction of the European idea of an inhabited centre, because such spots are chosen at points where currents of commerce converge ; but, on the other hand, these villages, considered as groups of human beings, do not as yet possess a distinct and abstract personality. They are well situated building-sites, where each separate village follows close upon another, but neither continues nor penetrates its neighbours' life.

### 3. THE EVOLUTION OF THE VILLAGE.

The history of the village is very simple.

(a) *Its Foundation*.—It is founded by the seceding member of some family, who separates from the parent tree, together with his wives, children, and slaves. His reason for so doing may be excess of population, an ambitious or independent nature, a disagreement with his parents, or the like. The site chosen is one which appears to unite the best conditions from every point of view, and must include land for tilling, water for domestic purposes and for fishing, a command of the trade routes, etc. Every one can take his choice, for there is no lack of land, and all that is necessary is not to interfere with persons who may have prior interests in the same district, so that litigation may be avoided, as is prudent in starting a new enterprise.

The multiplication and break-up of villages is thus effected by a sort of gemmation. The family, which is, as it were, the original nucleus of the village, grows

by the birth of children, the males among whom marry in their turn and lay the foundations of new families. Sometimes they remain clinging to the parent tree, but more frequently they separate from it and go abroad to form a new social cell.

(b) *Its Name*.—The most ordinary practice is to name the village after its founder and chief, as is both natural and proper, for it is indeed the chief's property, and, in a way, the chief himself. Those village clusters which owe their existence to a favourable geographical position usually derive their name from this circumstance, which may be the confluence of two streams, certain rocks or rapids, a difficult crossing, the neighbourhood of Europeans, etc. ; but as the village cluster often consists of the juxtaposition of a certain number of separate villages, each of the latter follows the general rule in regard to its own name ; that is to say, is designated by the name of the chief.

Travellers should mistrust the plurality of names often given to the same place by different tribes, for each tribe, as a matter of fact, regards these things in the light of its own particular nature, and characterizes them in accordance with the point of view which has struck it most, and which corresponds most closely to its own turn of mind, without any concern as to whether strangers will understand it.

(c) *Decay and Disappearance*.—The village is accordingly a real, living organism, which comes into being, grows, develops, experiences health and disease alternately, falls into decay and perishes.

The death of the chief, who is the real or supposititious father of all the inhabitants of the village, breaks the bonds of union between the constituent members of the group and dissolves the ties of mutual interests and emotional habits which made them feel their close mutual responsibilities. Again, epidemics exterminate

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whole villages, and in certain districts the males of the population are decimated during the warlike incursions of hostile tribes, while those that remain are carried far away into bondage together with the women, children, and slaves.



## CHAPTER I

# THE VILLAGE AS A PHYSICAL ENTITY

## I. BUILDINGS

### A. ARCHITECTURE: THE TWO TYPES OF NEGRO ARCHITECTURE.

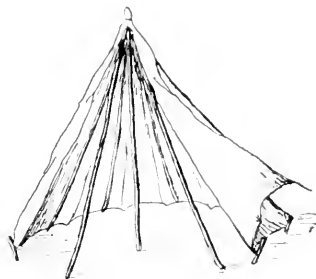
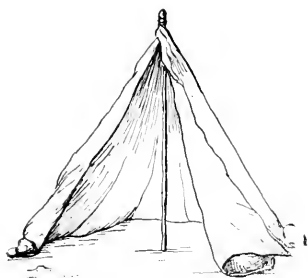
THE architecture of human dwellings reflects the mentality and the manners and customs of those who inhabit them, just as the mollusc's shell shows its adaptation to the creature it contains; but it does not follow that it is an easy task to establish the precise relation between the container and the thing contained, and in the case before us the primitive Natives of Africa are incapable of directing our search. Why are their structures divided into the two sharply distinguished types which we designate the circular-conical and the quadrangular shape? Why does a classification on this basis seem unquestionably natural, as characterizing at one stroke two entirely different ethnic groups, who inhabit absolutely distinct districts? In the great fluvial and forestal region of the Congo, that vast territory inhabited by the races which are more or less correctly included under the general name of Bantu, one finds a district where the soil is damp and where the broad valleys are overflowed by yearly floods and smothered in a hot and heavy reek. The local type of humanity has coarse features, thick lips, a very flattened nose, with brown as the normal colour, which, however, changes to brick-red and even albinism

in the bush. These Natives are all eaters of banana pastes, dika-bread, and especially of manioc, are mostly fierce, reserved in disposition, and of a suspicious and mistrustful nature. Among them the quadrangular type of architecture prevails. Proceeding towards the north, villages with conical huts appear instantaneously and without any transition, while at the same time there is an entire change in both climate and inhabitants. These are the pre-desert plains, the Sudanese steppes, which stretch in a broad irregular strip from the east of Africa to the west, between the fourth and fifteenth degrees north latitude. The soil and atmosphere are drier here, and there are extremes of heat and cold. The Natives have more refined and delicate features, their complexions are darker and more lustreless, and they are eaters of the seeds of millet, maize, sesame, etc. In character they are more exuberant, merrier, and more social than the southern tribes.

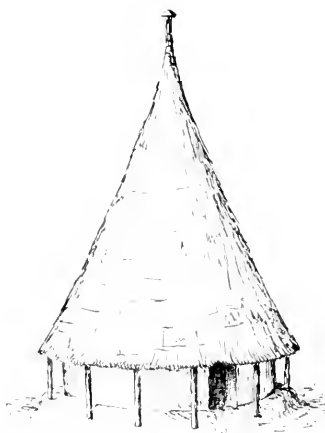
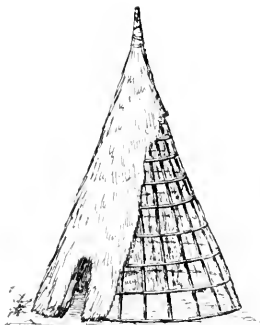
Which facts in this parallel series will suffice to explain the difference between the round and quadrangular types of architecture? Climate is the first thing that occurs to one's mind; but neither structure offers better protection from the heat, which is drier in the one region and damper in the other; or better shelter from the rains, which are more or less prolonged according to district, but which are everywhere torrential during the periods of the great storms. The following seem to me the most probable explanations of both types:—

### 1. *The Origin and Evolution of the Conical Type.*

Let us note, to begin with, that the Natives who have adopted the conical type probably came originally from the north-east, where vegetation is sparse on the grasslands, which indeed are sometimes quite barren, and where there is little or no natural shelter from the burning rays of the sun, moderated by no cloud of



Evolution of the Conical Hut.



Evolution of the Conical Hut.



Nzakara Hut.



Pambia Granary.



mist. The rains, too, decrease as one proceeds towards the north. Man was here obliged to supplement Nature's deficiencies by means of the *tent*, whose essentials are a central pole and some roughly sewn skins of animals. These skins are suspended by the middle from the central pole ; their free edge is spread out in circular form and is held down upon the ground by heavy stones or pegs. When the tent is large its sides are supported by other vertical poles, or else by pieces of wood, which follow the slant of the sides.

In my opinion, the circular hut is simply an imitation of the primitive tent. The central pole rarely survives, the only trace of it being its upper end, which forms a raised prolongation of the roof and represents the cord which fastened the skins to the central support in the original type. Furthermore, the substitution of discontinuous materials for the skins of animals necessitates a large number of wooden sidepieces, all of which are either tied together at the upper end or are fastened to a common stem, as I have just said, and spread out below like the generatrices of a cone. Flexible laths, arranged crosswise, secure the spreading battens and keep the entire structure rigid. These different parts are joined by means of lianas, or fibrous grasses, and handfuls of straw are then thrown over the whole, beginning at the bottom, and are fastened to the skeleton edifice. The builders work upwards in such a way that each succeeding layer covers two-thirds or three-fourths of the one below it. The top of the roof tapers off into that more or less raised prolongation of which I have just spoken, and finally blossoms out into various ornaments, which are not only decorative, but perform the double utilitarian function of being the point where the grasses of the last row meet and of preventing the rain from penetrating into the hut. The roof has an average pitch of fifty or sixty degrees, and its steep slope helps a great deal to make the summary cover remarkably

watertight ; for, as every one who has travelled in these countries has noticed with surprise, a hut whose roof allows the light to penetrate through many cracks in the daytime nevertheless forms a perfect shelter from the most diluvial rains.

There are several varieties of the conical type, including roofs which are very pointed, flattened, rounded, or bell-shaped ; but these are insignificant differences, and the principle of construction, like the origin of the type, is, I think, always the same.

The roof seldom lies directly on the ground, but is generally raised upon a low, circular clay wall, from thirty to forty inches high, in which an opening is made for a door. In the thickness of this wall there are posts which are driven securely into the ground, and sometimes another circular row of posts is arranged around the outside of the wall, beneath the edge of the roof, and if the hut is very large still another row is placed inside.

The framework of the conical roof is made separately, its dimensions corresponding to those of the circular wall. When it is completed, a gang of men lift it all together, carry it to its destination, and perch it upon the top of the wall, where it is securely tied to the upright posts by lianas or other fastenings, and, finally, the workmen clamber about in the framework and fasten to it successive rows of bundles of grass, which other workmen throw up to them from below.

## *2. Origin and Evolution of the Quadrilateral Type.*

The origin and evolution of the quadrilateral type seem to me quite as easy of explanation as those of the conical type. First, let us recall that this type is peculiar to the tribes of wooded and marshy regions. In the forest the foliage of the trees naturally shelters every living thing from rain ; but man improves upon Nature by tearing down leafy branches

and then heaping them slantingly against some obstacle, such as a tree-trunk, for instance. There is no old traveller in Africa who has not had occasion to make use of one of these extemporized shelters hastily thrown together by his men.

A noteworthy improvement consists in using the low and almost horizontal branch of some standing tree as a support. This arrangement is superior to the preceding, because it enables a man to lie down instead of squatting, and he will be still more protected from the violence of sudden squalls if he cuts down leafy branches and lays them slopingly on either side of the horizontal branch ; though of course these summary



FIG. 3.—Improvised Shelter.

shelters are not in the least watertight. All goes comparatively well during the first moments of the tempest, but the rain soon penetrates the leafy mass, and although one does not get quite as wet as if one were outside, there is no great difference. When the horizontal branch, which serves as ridge-pole to the improvised roof, is so weak that it bends beneath the weight, its free end is propped up by a forked pole, driven upright into the ground, and from this it is but a step to the use of a cross-beam, whose ends rest upon two posts and which supports the two inclined planes of the roof.

The forest tribes soon discovered that they would do very well to take the broad, parchment-like leaves of several herbaceous plants which abound in the bush and lay them flat in regular rows, pinning them to slender sticks by means of splinters or thorns.

They afterwards substituted the lateral folioles of palm-fronds or bundles of straw (in the steppe country) for these leaves, which soon withered and decayed ; and eventually this stage of Native architecture shows us a dwelling which is a sort of shed, wide open at

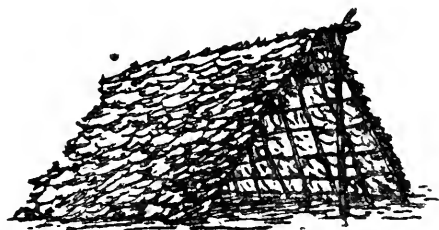


FIG. 4.—Primitive Hut made of Leaves.

both ends, like a book lying face down. This pure type still exists in certain places.<sup>1</sup>

The interior of this primitive structure is open to the eddying swirls of wind and rain, and is habitable only in the middle, because of the angle formed by its side walls with the ground. This inconvenience led the builders to make two new improvements, which consisted in closing the two open ends, and then in raising the roof upon posts, the spaces between which were sometimes left open and sometimes, as was more frequently the case, were filled with the same sort of leaves or straw which served as building material for the roof. Subsequently the builders learned to remove the bark of certain species of forest trees, and to make

<sup>1</sup> On the River Mosaka.



it into squares by compression and desiccation under large stones.<sup>1</sup>

The dimensions of this rudimentary hut barely suffice for the primitive couple, and accordingly, as the size of the family grew by the addition of new wives and by the birth of children, the hut was lengthened to any extent which was necessary, but its original dimensions were not increased in width. Division into sections by interior partitions did not take place at this time, but later gave rise to the two subtypes of longitudinal

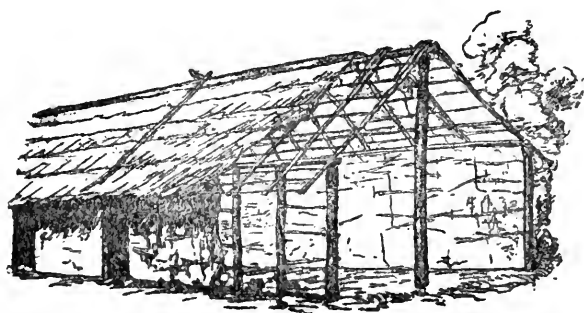


FIG. 5.—Construction of the Rectangular Hut.

partitionment and transverse partitionment, from the latter of which the separate quadrangular hut originated.

(a) *Longitudinal Partitionment*.—According to the first method,<sup>2</sup> a partition divides the continuous hut lengthwise into two portions, which are generally unequal in size. The front portion, which opens towards the road by means of doors cut at intervals, forms a long, narrow passage, which is at the same time a kitchen, dining-room, and dormitory for the common people. The rear portion again is divided by transverse partitions into several small cells, which communicate with the general hall by low, narrow doors,

<sup>1</sup> The Bonjos, Misanga and Fans.

<sup>2</sup> Middle Ubangi.

and which are the separate bedrooms of the different households.

(b) *Transverse Partitionment*.—This subtype<sup>1</sup> obviously reflects the work of people who are independent in character, and here, too, the long, continuous hut contains the family, of which it is the concrete symbol ; but the cells of which it is composed have no longer a circulatory and nervous system shared by all, for the general meeting-ground is the public square or else the palaver-house.

(c) *Separate Huts*.—I cannot decide whether the type

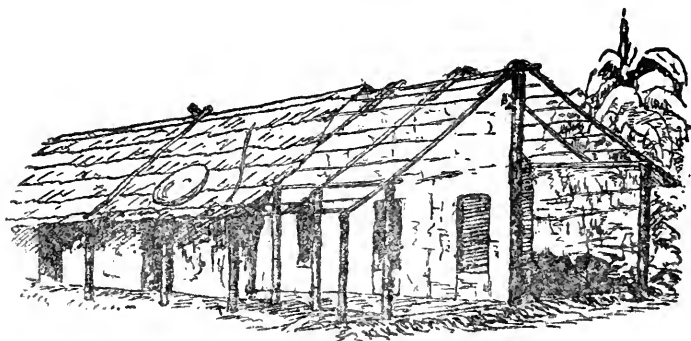


FIG. 6.—Construction of the Hut divided longitudinally.

of the separate hut is an independent product or whether the division of the continuous hut gave rise to it ; but for two reasons I incline towards the latter hypothesis. In the first place, it seems more logical and natural, and in the second place it is almost proved true by a transition type met with near Wesso, in the Sanga. In that district several great chiefs have built enormous huts, which are also very tall, and which are quite different in style from the long, continuous hut. They show the usual concern for defining the different family groups by the cells which run in succession

<sup>1</sup> Fan.

around three sides of the interior, as well as by the one cell erected in the middle of the central space for the husband and father of the family.

The separate rectangular hut <sup>1</sup> is the highest type of Native architecture, the most comfortable and habitable dwelling, and the most susceptible of improvements in size, proportions, and arrangements, as well as that in which the secrets and intimacy of private life are most respected.

In the interior of the continent, where foreign influences are not felt, I do not believe that a single example can be found of a separate hut divided into more than two rooms—i.e. a bedroom, which is a small chamber reserved for the man and wife, and another common apartment, which is also the kitchen, dining-room, and dormitory for the children and servants. The three or four rooms seen in huts on the coast are undoubtedly imitated from European houses.

## B. CONSTRUCTION.

In order that the reader may be in a better position to picture to himself the conditions of life which exist among these tribes, it seems to me that it will be well to give a few very concise details as to their choice of building materials and their manner of using them.

### 1. *Dimensions of the Huts.*

With rare exceptions, Negro dwellings are so very small that it is often impossible to stand upright in them, save in the middle, and it is only by bending double that one can enter them. The bedrooms, or "sleeping compartments," as I should say, are so contracted in all their dimensions that one cannot stretch out at full length in them. The pseudo-Islamized Natives of the north and one tribe of the Middle

<sup>1</sup> Among the coast tribes, such as the Bobangi, Bateke and Bakongo.

Sanga are the only people whom I have known to build spacious huts, and even with them it is the exception. There is no doubt that the former <sup>1</sup> are simply imitating Turks and Europeans, while the two or three enormous buildings which the latter <sup>2</sup> constructed were merely palaces erected for the glory of their invincible conqueror—their miniature Sesostris—Minganga.

The prevailing custom of building small huts is certainly necessitated by local conditions. I believe that it is principally due to a simplicity of construction rendered unavoidable by rudimentary tools and lack of skill, to a feeling that it is useless to erect vast edifices in which to spend only the few hours devoted to sleep or the period of a tornado's duration, and, lastly, and perhaps chiefly, to a desire for protection from cold and damp, since people who live almost nude and who are ignorant of woollen coverings can keep out the freezing cold of the nights only by rolling themselves together, with their bodies touching, in a space as confined as possible and which may easily be heated by a burning log. Some of the French administrators, with a praiseworthy desire of ameliorating the lot of their subjects, have tried to make them adopt more spacious dwellings; but when they have secured obedience the lucky proprietors have either deserted their sumptuous abodes and gone back to live in their low, smoky huts, or else have built small hovels, reminding them of their native customs, inside their new palaces. This small instance proves once more, if proof were needed, that everything holds together in progress, and that the standard of life cannot be raised unless there is at the same time an improvement in many small details, which are none the less indispensable because they seem subordinate. Again, we see that man's dwelling is cast in its occupant's mould and in that of his customs, character, and physical and intellectual capacities. If the Natives along the

<sup>1</sup> The Zandes.

<sup>2</sup> The Pomos.

coast have adopted a style of architecture more like the European, it is because they have at the same time Europeanized their whole manner of life, their dress, bedding, furniture, and food.

## 2. *The Framework.*

Posts, columns, and wall-plates all consist of the trunks of very small trees or of perfectly straight branches, not more than four or six inches in diameter. The walls and partitions are made up of any kind of boughs or the rachides of palm-leaves. The uprights are forked or else mortised at their upper ends to receive the horizontal members, such as the wall-plates, ridge-poles, etc.

## 3. *Framing.*

All the different parts of the building are joined by lianas. A liana is selected which is about as thick as a man's thumb and as long as possible, is split into two or four lengths, and is left in water to supple it. Just before it is used it is twisted in all directions to free it from fibres, so that it becomes like a bundle of tow, and after it dries is exceedingly strong. Bands of green bark, which are twisted in the same way as the lianas, are used to join parts which do not need such stout fastenings.

## 4. *The Roof.*

Roofing materials differ according to district and to the way in which they are used.

We have seen how the pointed tall-hat-shaped roof of the conical hut is made, and the following very brief description of the structure of the roofs of quadrangular huts readily applies to it also :—

The framework consists of a ridge-pole resting on

the ends of upright posts placed at the gables and at intervals on the axis of the building. The middle of the roof, which slopes both ways, rests upon this ridge-pole, and each end is supported by two wall-plates placed upon upright posts introduced into the thickness of the outer walls. The ridge-pole is usually made of rachides of palm-leaves, whose natural curvature, being retained by some tribes, gives their roofs the shape of a boat's keel turned upside down.<sup>1</sup> No tie-beam connects one wall-plate with the other, so that the walls are prevented from spreading and the building from collapsing only by the posts, which are firmly planted in the ground. The roof is, however, composed of light materials and has a pitch of forty or forty-five degrees, and, moreover, the large posts which support the ridge-pole also carry the greatest share of the weight of the rafters and the roofing.

One end of the rafters, which consist of rachides of palm-leaves, rests upon the wall-plate, the other upon the ridge-pole. The fibrous structure of the palm-frond allows of its being folded across the ridge-pole, and this folded part is then tied both to the ridge-pole and to the rafter which corresponds to it on the other side. At its lower end the rafter is securely attached to the wall-plate, beyond which it projects fifteen inches or more. Small sticks are fastened across the rafters like laths. Upon this skeleton structure rests the roofing material, which consists of leaves in forest districts or of straw in the grasslands.

The only leaves which make roofs that are both watertight and durable are the lateral folioles of the fronds of different varieties of palms, such as *elais*, *raphia*, and *phœnix*. These folioles are cut with a knife from their common rachis, and while still green are folded across, two-thirds from the bottom, are placed side by side upon a thin, flat stick, and pinned in

<sup>1</sup> The Pomos.

this position by little splinters of wood. The squares thus formed are light in weight and rainproof, and are arranged like tiles in successive rows upon the framework of the roof, each row lapping two-thirds or three-fourths over the next.

For straw roofing the tall guinea-grass is used. Some builders simply throw handfuls of this upon the skeleton of the roof, with the blades underneath and the stalks on top. They begin at the lower end of the roof and work up in successive layers, which they hold in place at intervals by transverse sticks laid across each layer of straw and fastened to the skeleton by lianas. Other workmen, who are more careful, first make little brooms or bundles the thickness of a man's arm, and place them in position by two different methods. The first way is to put the stalks on top, as before, and so this is not, properly speaking, a new way of roofing. The second way is to put the stalks at the bottom and the blades on top. The bundles are placed side by side and tightly pressed together in symmetrical rows, each of which laps far over the next lower one, forming a succession of steps, with tidy, straight edges, whose effect is rather nice.

### 5. *Walls and Partitions.*

Walls and partitions are made of any sort of leaves, of squares of palm-folioles, of straw, or, lastly, of bark, according to the resources of the district. Bark partition walls are found chiefly among Natives of the forest region. Nothing like masonry, stone, mud, pisé, or brick is used anywhere. The only exception is the low wall of the round hut ; but its small dimensions make it little more than a circular mound, formed by pushing the adjacent earth back to the circumference which bounds the foundation of the house under construction.

6. *Windows.*

There are no windows, nor are there any openings whatever, except the door.

7. *Doors.*

Doors are everywhere narrow and low. In the conical hut the door is often only a sort of hole, which

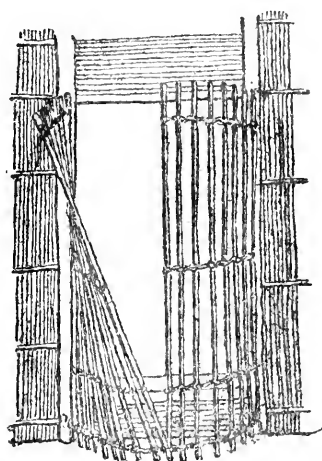


FIG. 7.—A Door (Niari Valley).

is between thirty-two inches and a yard above the level of the ground, and through which one can therefore enter only by crawling. The entrances to huts of the quadrangular type are from forty to sixty inches high, but as their lower part is very often obstructed by a sill, fifteen or eighteen inches in height, any one who wishes to get in must bend, draw up his knees, and at the same time turn sideways, because of the narrowness of the doorway, which is only twenty or twenty-four inches wide.



The simplest means are used to keep the door shut. A panel of bark or straw is attached to the outside and fastened by a liana to a crossbar on the inside ; but the more ingenious tribes have invented a panel suspended from a horizontal rod, which slips along the wall like the door of a luggage-van. Between Brazzaville and the coast one finds an original method of fastening which acts somewhat like a fan. Animals cannot cross this barrier, which is the principal object sought, and even human beings have difficulty in getting through ; but the damp and cold have free access. The locksmith's art is still to come in Tropical Africa.

The doors inside the hut are still lower and narrower than the outside doors.

### C. TOWN HALLS, OFFICES, AND OUTHOUSES.

In addition to its dwelling-houses a complete village contains several other structures, whose uses are very diverse. We shall mention the principal ones.

1. First of all there are the flat straw canopies, raised upon four stakes, beneath which the villagers seek shelter from the sun and spend the hot hours of the day. A shed, consisting of a roof which slopes on both sides and is raised upon posts, but which has no wall, is an improvement on the canopy, for it offers a protection from rain as well as sun. Not only idlers spend their time here, but skilled workmen as well : potters, blacksmiths, gunsmiths and makers of utensils and tools, and, on the high plateaux, spinners and weavers.

2. The most curious and the most important of these supplementary buildings is called *abayn* among the Fans, *bandza* in the Middle Ubangi, and *banjo* in the Sanga, and is both guardhouse and town hall. As a guardhouse its purpose is pre-eminently military in

the beginning, and it then consists of a rectangular hut, which is covered by a sloping roof; it has no interior partition, and its walls are made of thick adjoining stakes driven upright into the ground. Two doors, cut opposite one another, give access to the interior, and in order to render entrance more difficult and defence more efficacious, are made very narrow, and are, moreover, constructed obliquely in the thickness of the wall. Interstices which serve as loopholes and peepholes are introduced between the stakes, and this type of blockhouse is set in such a place that any

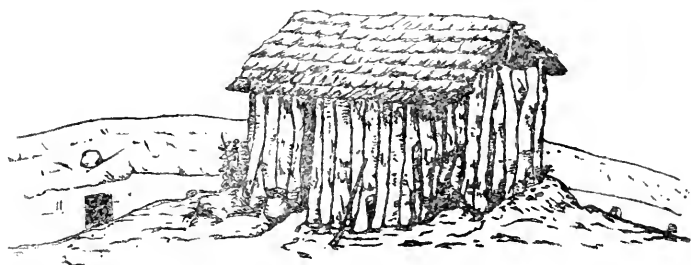


FIG. 8.—Abayn or Guardhouse.

one who wishes to enter the village must pass in front of it.

In districts where war is no longer continually threatening the guardhouse assumes a more complaisant aspect, and develops into a simple town hall; in which case it is no longer built of thick stakes, but of light materials, and has a great many wide, open doors.

In several districts where the inhabitants were restless and combative<sup>1</sup> the fear of surprises caused them in days gone by to erect watchtowers, in which they posted sentinels who kept guard over the surrounding country. These structures were simple floors of boughs set upon tall posts or placed among the branches

<sup>1</sup> In the Upper and Middle Sanga.

of trees ; but they have totally disappeared at the present time or have become exceedingly rare.

3. Domestic offices are almost unknown in the Black Man's country. We have already seen that the cooking is done in the dwelling-house, and when shops are required they are set up in a part of it which is temporarily given over to them. The farmyard is everywhere : in the open air as well as in the town hall. Goats, pigs, and fowls find generous hospitality, at their need, under the same roof as human beings, though a few pastoral tribes build them special shelters, which are sometimes small, very low, straw-covered cages, set in the village square level with the ground ; while elsewhere they are coops built on posts at a height sufficient to keep the inmates out of the reach of carnivorous animals.

4. The grain-eating tribes, who came originally from the north, store millet, maize, sesame, and ground-nuts in a sort of large vat of dried clay, which is covered with a pointed, thatched roof and raised on posts (Pl. XI., 6). The Natives elevate these structures to a great height in order to protect their provisions from the devastating attacks of the white ants, or, rather, that they may watch for and destroy, as they appear, the galleries with which these neuroptera undermine the wood and shelter themselves from the light while they carry the precious harvest to their subterranean dwellings.

## II. THE ARRANGEMENT OF THE VILLAGE

The order in which huts form a village is in correspondence with their architectural type ; for it is almost universally true that continuous huts will be grouped in parallel order and separate huts in dispersed order.

## A. THE PARALLEL ORDER.

The parallel order consists of two continuous huts placed opposite one another, with a broad road between them, or of two series of continuous huts following one after the other in a fairly straight line and always keeping the road between them. Sometimes the village contains only one very long road, sometimes it is composed of several similar constructions set side by side, the huts of each unit backing up against those of the neighbouring ones ; and, lastly, the road in the middle may be considerably widened and closed at one end by a third continuous hut, so that the whole assumes the appearance of a square closed upon three sides, and the village then contains one or more similar structures, joined together and opening to the same exposure.

These various structures are often completed by guardhouses or palaver-huts, which are situated at the two ends of the village and at intervals along the road in the centre, so that the village with its one street, like a long snake cut into rings by the *abayns* or *bandzas*, is really a fortified place, with its back to the enemy along its whole length and its two entrances defended by forts.

## B. THE DISPERSED ORDER.

The dispersed order is self-explanatory, for it means irregularity, lack of symmetry, and a casual way of building. It denotes a confused mass of dwellings, in which each man places his hut where it suits him, unless it disturbs his neighbours. The number of huts in these village clusters varies greatly ; for in one place each group consists of from two to ten huts at the most,<sup>1</sup> while elsewhere the village extends to a length of several miles, and has a population of several thousand.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Bakamba.<sup>2</sup> Yakoma.

## C. GARDENS AND PLANTATIONS.

The gardens are in the middle of the village and around it when it is of the dispersed order ; but the parallel order requires that they should be outside the village and back of the continuous huts. They are devoted entirely to market gardening and to the cultivation of such articles of everyday consumption as bananas, potatoes, kidney-beans, colocasia (*taro*), groundnuts, African pepper, gumbo (*Hibiscus esculentus*), amaranthus, etc.

Large plantations are either relegated to the outskirts of the village, and form a second cultivated strip around the dwellings, or else are situated in scattered parts of the bush, where they are protected from passing thieves. In these places, which are prudently concealed, the Natives often build a few modest huts, where they isolate the sick, the crippled, pregnant women, persons who are possessed, etc.

## III. THE SITE OF THE VILLAGE.

The site which is selected for the village reveals the character of its inhabitants and their manner of life ; for in one place it exhibits their carelessness or boldness, in another it shows their suspicion and caution, while in a third it gives evidence of their mercantile or industrial talents. Generally, in the Congo Basin at least, Natives seek the neighbourhood of a stream. The great watercourses all share in the geographical peculiarity of having a circular mound on the river-bank, between two depressions, one of which is always filled by the main current, while the other is inundated every year at the season of floods. This hillock is the favourite site for large villages, since it places them as close as may be to the "road that walks," while they run the least possible risk of being caught in the annual floods.

Tribes who are remote from important watercourses prefer hillocks or hills which are surrounded by rivulets of running water.

It is remarkable that, save for the riverain tribes of the Upper Ubangi, most of the Natives who dwell

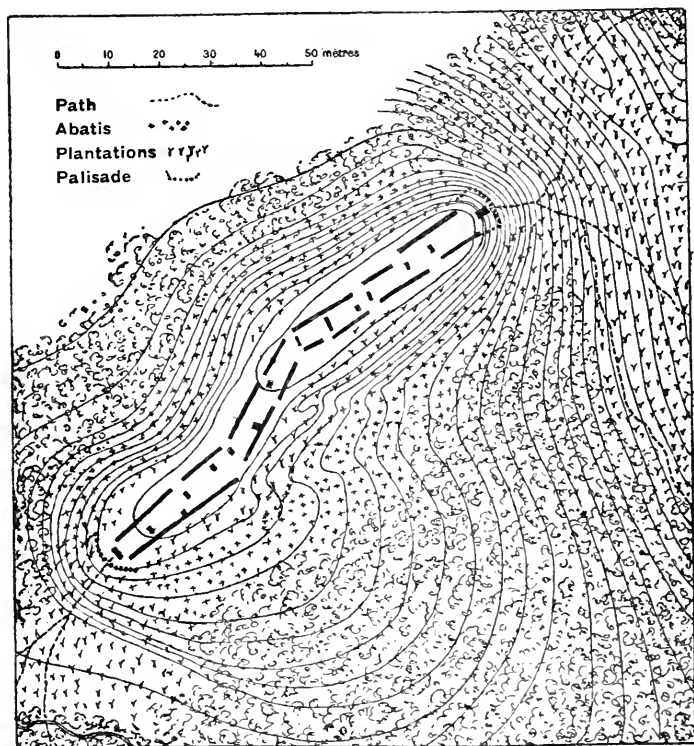


FIG. 9.—Type of a Fortified Village: the Village of Golabied (Bakuli), from a Plan by Lieutenant Debrand.

in conical huts have, in a way, a sort of hydrophobia, and seek bare and arid ridges scorched by the sun. I have seen many of the most extensive villages,<sup>1</sup> and even capitals of Sultans, whose inhabitants had condemned themselves to fetch water in their calabashes

<sup>1</sup> Among the Zandes.

and jars from a distance of several miles. Others draw water for domestic purposes from little holes dug in the beds of rivulets that have run dry, and in which there are a few drops of stagnant, muddy, sickening water, that is infested with swarming parasites and has a luxuriant fungus growth.

Among warlike tribes <sup>1</sup> villages of the continuous-hut type and parallel order are perched in strategic positions upon precipitous heights. Such a village climbs a steep hill, descends the next slope, is interrupted by a rivulet, forms again upon the following declivity, cuts a corner of the forest, slopes off across a glade ; but everywhere guards the roads and watches the approaches. It has an eye to yonder hill and to the prospect of yonder valley, but the strongest clutch is always on a bend of the stream or some spot where an enemy might effect an entrance. The flanks, upon which the linked houses turn their backs, are defended by an abatis of trees, by ditches, by caltrops and splinters.<sup>2</sup> Their commanding position, the chaotic riot of the giant forest trees, the skilfully contrived windings in the paths which lead to them, the treacherous density of the thickets, the steepness of the declivities, a slippery clay soil, and the genuine courage of the warriors <sup>3</sup> make an attack upon these citadels of wood, bark, and leaves a dangerous affair even for regular troops.

The above is a description, which I have purposely made brief, of the site, construction, and arrangement of the village, the analysis of which was necessary, no matter how dry. We shall now attempt to study the life of the village, its physiology, and its functions

<sup>1</sup> Ogowe and Middle Ubangi.

<sup>2</sup> Splinters of bamboo fixed upright into the ground.—*Trans.*

<sup>3</sup> I have seen Pawans, who had remained in a village which had been bombarded and set on fire, unflinchingly await the landing-party, and only retreat into the forests after discharging their last shot and when they were completely hemmed in by our Senegalese troops.

of nutrition and correlation, and shall then endeavour to penetrate its collective psychology and ethics. I am aware that there is logically no fixed line of demarcation between the different parts of the social mechanism. But no matter how artificial my division may seem, I find that it simplifies the process of explanation, and I believe that the reader, on his part, will discover that it makes for clearness and perspicuity.



## CHAPTER II

### THE VILLAGE AS A LIVING ENTITY

I SHALL study the different functions of the life of the village in the order which seems to me the most natural ; by which I mean the order in which one is logically authorized to place their successive appearance in primitive society. First comes the division of time, and after that hygiene, diet, clothing, furniture, utensils and tools, and, last of all, commerce. The same method applied to each of these functions will lead us to seek modern evidence of their origin and history, and the development of the arts and crafts to which they have given rise, among the tribes inhabiting Equatorial Africa. This investigation will occasionally lead me to repeat things that are well known and have become common property ; but even so, I do not think that I ought to desist from my original resolve of not paying any attention to classical dogmas ; though of course I shall be glad if Negro society once more confirms the accuracy of theories which have already been advanced and demonstrated by other means.

#### A. DIVISION OF TIME.

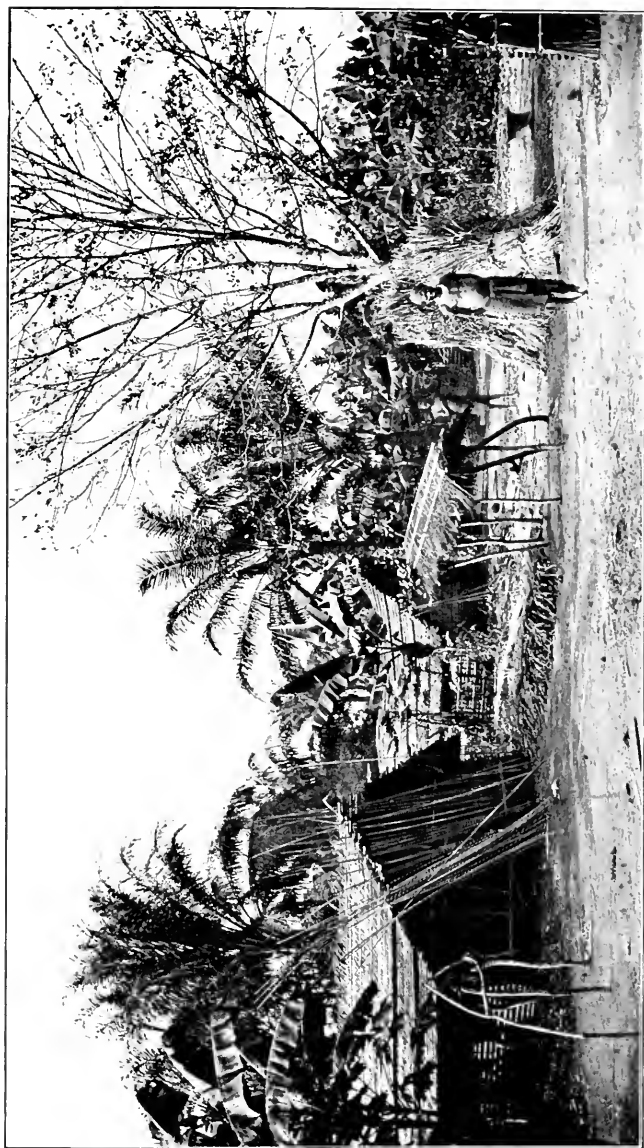
Everything here below is a function of time, and in the case of man, especially, time limits all the actions of his life, though in the beginning he submits to it without understanding it. Most Negroes live in absolute ignorance of this important factor of their existence,

and time has for them neither measure nor value. The incessant variation of all things and the mutability of their own beings do not strike them—indeed, do not affect them in the least. They have no regard for the past, no dread of the future, no softened memories of childhood, nor any hope for maturity and old age, and death's fatal hour is so remote that they do not think of it at all.

Nor do celestial phenomena arouse their attention to any greater extent. They have no decided ideas about the apparent daily revolution in the vault of heaven, and still less about the exact motion of the moon and the planets. All this seems chance to them, and certainly not important enough to detain a serious mind. They have but just noticed the periodicity of the seasons and the recurrent and similar phases of the moon, but they have not ascertained the regularity of these phenomena, nor have they ever dreamed of counting the number of days contained in the different astronomical cycles. A woman cannot even calculate the recurrence of her menstrual period, and, according to her ideas, the length of gestation is a vague period which differs in different persons. Whenever I tried to convince women of this period's uniform duration I encountered the most absolute scepticism and, what was worse still, I brought ridicule upon myself.

Where a matter of business is concerned, however, or a journey or appointment the Natives do count by days, if there are not too many of them; but they express the number of nycthemera by the number of nights contained therein. Thus they say, "In three nights you will come to see me," or, "You will sleep three nights, then you will come." It is for this reason that some dialects translate the French word *jour*, in the sense of nycthemeron, by the native word which means night.<sup>1</sup> Others have a particular word which corresponds to the German *Tag* or the English *day*.

<sup>1</sup> The Fan dialect.



*Plat. XII.*

A VILLAGE ON THE BANKS OF THE NIARI.



The only part of the nycthemeron which is of practical interest in such a climate is that period during which the sun is above the horizon ; for the difficulty and, indeed, the danger of going about the country after sundown compel human beings to inactivity during the night, except for their dances, which take place when there is a moon. We know that in the tropics sunrise and sundown occur at about six o'clock in the morning and six in the evening respectively, with a few moments' variation. Between these two boundaries the Negro has made no intermediate divisions ; so that when he wishes to indicate a particular time during the day he points his hand to the position which the sun occupied in the sky at the hour in question. This gives the time with a fair amount of accuracy, for, as we know, the horary arc, which is almost perpendicular to the horizon in the Equatorial Zone, is visibly proportional to the time of day, and is the same at all seasons.

In the Lower Congo there is a sort of week, which consists of four days,<sup>1</sup> on each of which a market is held in a fixed place.

There is seldom any occasion to count by moons, for no plans are made which take so long to develop.

The recurrence of the dry and rainy seasons and the periodic floods of the great watercourses fix the best time for planting, travelling by land and water, and making hunting or fishing expeditions. Our word "year" is translated into the coast dialects ; but, although the term which designates it has a native form, there is no doubt in my mind that the idea itself is an importation from Europe. This is

<sup>1</sup> The days of this week are designated by the following names : among the Bakamba—mpika, nkoy, bukondzo, buduka ; among the Bakugni—sono, nkoyo, bukondzo, buduka ; among the Bayaka of the Belgian Congo, according to Torday and Joyce—pungu, gun, tek, buyuka.

clearly demonstrated by the inability of enlisted men; especially in the early days of the French occupation, to estimate the length of their time in the service.<sup>1</sup>

I do not believe that a long discussion on the causes of the Negro's indifference to time would be profitable. Intellectual inferiority and a blunted sense of observation no doubt have much to do with it, but we must plead some extenuating circumstances. The sky is hidden by foliage in the wooded districts, and the enormous fluvial region is shrouded in eternal mists, which condense into clouds at nightfall and, during most of the year, draw an impenetrable veil across the heavens. In the face of such obstacles how could man discover the variations of the sun's movements, which are, moreover, very slight in these low latitudes? How could he mark the course of those stars whose progress is perceptible in the vault of heaven? How could he perceive that the astronomical phenomena coincided with the great terrestrial phenomena of seasons and times of flood? We must also note that the foliage of the trees is always green, and that there is no annual migration of birds. Moreover, there are other anxieties of a very prosaic nature which interfere with the African Native's contemplation of the heavens: they are cold and hunger and the incessant struggle against an animal and vegetable world which is hostile to him. The worship of Urania, which taught men to measure time, presupposed dry regions, a clear sky, and sharply defined seasons which the senses were bound to notice because of the alternating impressions of heat and cold that they received from them. The leisure of a pastoral life was a prerequisite for the study of astronomy, as was a temperate and mild climate and a daily supply of the vital necessities

<sup>1</sup> According to M. Dusselje, manager of the "Alimaïenne" Company, the Bateke of the Alima have a precise understanding of the year, which they divide into four seasons.

guaranteed by the fleece, the milk, and the flesh of the shepherd's flocks. The starveling never meditates.

## B. HYGIENE.

I have previously discussed the important subject<sup>1</sup> of personal cleanliness, and what I said of individuals is enough to give a glimpse of the nature of their public hygiene. It is not that the use of the broom is unknown, for this domestic implement is simply pulled from a leafy branch or a palm-frond. The middle of the village, the squares, and the central road are cleared of grass and swept almost every day, and every one cleans the space in front of his hut ; but the rubbish is thrown back of the huts, around the village, and forms an unspeakable zone of palm-kernels, bones, decaying refuse, and human and animal excrement. It is a dunghill which is surely very beneficial to the banana plantations, but a plague centre of pestilence and a paradisiacal home for clouds of flies of every size and colour.

There is no place set apart as a latrine.<sup>2</sup> The same garden receives the superfluous products of nutrition and the handful of leaves or the little stick that is used to conclude the operation. There is nothing very out of the way in this during the great rains of the hot weather, which carry everything with them in their rush ; but during the dry season one cannot help regretting the anis-scented fragrance of the blossoming palm-trees.

I have previously divided the Natives of Equatorial Africa into clean and dirty tribes. The former live on the banks of the great watercourses, while the latter dwell entirely inland. The former extend to the community a fair measure of the care which individuals

<sup>1</sup> See p. 159.

<sup>2</sup> But we may note that in Gabun there is such a place, situated near the village, and called *ogombo*.

take of their persons, but the latter share their uncleanness fraternally.<sup>1</sup> Squatting in the dust, the mud, and the filth, they hand on to one another viruses, ulcers, frambœsia, leprosy, and syphilis, which latter is a consequence of the European occupation. There are swarms of vermin, such as lice, *phthirius*, bugs, and ticks, and the jigger has flourished and multiplied with extreme rapidity ever since it was introduced into Africa by the White Man.<sup>2</sup>

### C. DIET.

Among all the Negro tribes the preparation of food-stuffs has reached one and the same stage of development and has there remained, so that we have no modern evidence to point out the successive steps of its historical evolution. Outside of fish and game, with very rare exceptions,<sup>3</sup> none of the Natives limit themselves to such natural products of the earth as roots, leaves, and wild fruits. None live on raw meat, and, indeed, they cook most of their vegetable food. The culinary art is fairly advanced, and comprises sauces, stews, and combinations of meats and vegetables, while it knows the use of oils and fats, and, lastly, of spices and condiments.

The people of Africa live under the perpetual law of hunger, and hence to eat his fill, to glut until he gets an indigestion, is the Negro's *idée fixe*, for his bliss comes from a full stomach. During the course of this investigation I have several times noted this permanent state of semi-starvation on a virgin soil which is yet overflowing with richness and vitality. It would be interesting to seek the causes of this apparent contradiction, but I can indicate only the most essential ones in this place.

<sup>1</sup> Fan, Zandes.

<sup>2</sup> I believe that it has now invaded the whole of Equatorial Africa.

<sup>3</sup> Among the forest tribes.



The Negro's indolence, carelessness, and improvidence have a large share in producing this state of affairs ; but I am tempted to say that the main cause lies rather in unconscious discouragement and a feeling of helplessness against superior force. Surrounding conditions must be taken into special account. Since the Europeans have established themselves in these parts they have thrown themselves into the struggle too, but have they been much more successful than their black brothers? They have brought an immense amount of energy and knowledge to the work, but it is no exaggeration to say that the results which they have obtained are exceedingly indifferent. The gardens they have planted have numerous formidable enemies, for sometimes drought wilts the plants and kills them, sometimes a few moments of diluvial rain may undermine the ground, carry away the cultivated land, or bury the garden beds under heaps of sand. Humidity rots the most delicate varieties of their plants, and they are devoured by legions of voracious insects, such as ants, termites, grasshoppers, and caterpillars—those innumerable hordes of little creatures whose infinite numbers destroy the hardest woods, and overcome obstacles which are apparently quite insurmountable. In Europe no one has any idea of the tenacity of these microscopic enemies. Man has no weapon against the invasion of the silkworms when they assault his house ; locusts cross rivers more than a hundred yards broad, and cannot be turned back by barriers of fire. On the Upper Mbomu I have seen the subsoil so infested with termites that a board put on the ground in the morning in some open place was attacked from underneath before the end of the day, for we all know that termites cannot brave the sun's rays without danger to their lives. I have seen clouds of butterflies, all of the same species, passing over a district for three months at a time, like flakes of red snow, and in such close array that one could destroy dozens of them by throwing

one's hat on the ground. The real savage beast of Equatorial Africa, and the most formidable, is the insect.

But to come back to the enemies of the cultivated land, we may also mention the monkeys, which destroy the fields of rice, maize, and sorghum, the hippopotami, which wallow in the plantations, and the elephants, which trample them and tear them with their trunks. How often the Natives come begging the White Man to deliver them from these embarrassing neighbours !

Even when the harvest is in, the heat and humidity combined quickly cause it to deteriorate, and the termites and ants, assisted by the weevils, appear once more and complete the work of destruction.

The breeding of poultry and live stock encounters similar difficulties. Since man has not a sufficiency for his own wants, the fowls and ducks are badly fed, and are, besides, a prey to multitudes of carnivorous creatures of all sizes, both four-footed and six-legged, among which the notorious ants are not the least terrible. Eggs are delicacies much appreciated by ichneumons and other farmyard pillagers. The foes of goats are the lion, the leopard, and the python ; while the hog, which is seldom seen, is the victim of the same enemies, to which the bladder-worm must be added. The attempts which have hitherto been made to breed cattle have either failed or else have had very indifferent results, inasmuch as the bovine race succumbs to various contagious diseases, for which no remedy, either preventive or curative, has yet been discovered.

The clearing of land and the increase of population have driven large numbers of these enemies of our agricultural enterprises away from the inhabited districts. But the other causes of failure will tax the resources of European intelligence if we are to advance from the simple harvesting of the natural products of these regions to a commercial exploitation of them. At present we must content ourselves with the statement

that husbandry and the breeding of stock in Equatorial Africa are sciences which have yet to be created from the very beginning. At all events, it would be bad taste on our part to judge the savages of these lands harshly because they are not cleverer and more skilful than ourselves.

It is easy to draw up an almost complete list of the names of all the foodstuffs of Tropical Africa, and I shall give it below. A few explanatory notes will fix the most interesting characteristics of these aliments, and will give me an opportunity of describing, as we proceed, the kinds of work and the arts and manufactures connected with them.

#### THE ANIMAL KINGDOM.

Men, monkeys (all species), dog (domestic), ichneumon, rat, atherura (the bush-tailed porcupine), aulacodus (the ground-pig), pangolin (the scaly ant-eater), antelopes (many species), goat (domestic : only the meat is eaten, neither milk, butter, nor cheese being utilized), sheep (domestic), cattle (domestic, and only among the Dinkas for their milk), wild cattle, elephant, hog (domestic), phacochærus (the wart-hog), hippopotamus.

All the birds which can be caught ; the rapaces and small species are not eaten. We may mention the jacko parrot, pigeon parrot, or green parrot (phalacrotreron), turtle-doves, francolin, cocks and hens (domestic : the meat, but not the eggs), Guinea-fowl and bustard.

Marine turtles, crocodiles, varan (the monitor), python.

No batrachians.

All the sea and fresh-water fish.

Several marine crustacea and one fresh-water shrimp.

Caterpillars, bees (honey), ants (the winged insect), termites (queens, workers, and winged insects), locusts.

Marine molluscs. In the interior a large fresh-water oyster, very common in the Upper Ubangi, and a kind of big snail : these are, I believe, the only molluscs found in the interior of Tropical Africa.

#### THE VEGETABLE KINGDOM.

Several mushrooms.

Sorghum and millet (meal from the seeds, and beer), sugar-sorghum, sugar-cane, colocasia (taro), elæis (kernel, oil, wine), borassus (covering for fruit and wine), yam, pineapple (imported), banana-tree (fruit), pistia (salt), coffee-tree (merely mentioned, not utilized), potatoes,

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Guinea-pepper, sesame (oil), bassia (karite), hibiscus esculentus (gumbo), kola-tree (fruit), baobab (fruit), manioc (root and leaves), mango-tree (imported), papaw-tree (imported), *Irvingia Gabonensis*, *Cucumeropsis Mannii*, *Terminalia Macroptera* (oil), guava-tree (imported), tamarind, arachis (nuts, oil,) voandzeia (fruits), several kidney-beans and lupins.

### THE MINERAL KINGDOM.

Salts extracted by lixiviation from certain vegetable substances, especially *Pistia stratiotes*.

Sodium chloride, extremely rare in the interior.

Clay (geophagy).

Water.

1. The subject of anthropophagy has been previously discussed in such detail <sup>1</sup> that it is useless to recur to it here.

2. It is an established fact that African cannibals eat dogs, and even fatten them for slaughter, while most non-anthropophagous tribes abstain from this food ; but I should consider it rash to deduce from this fact an argument in favour of the theory that there is a fixed connection between cannibalism and a taste for the flesh of man's best friend.

3. The Negro has so little aversion to tainted meat that one might think he preferred it to fresh. He will pick up and cook carrion which is in an advanced stage of decomposition, whose meat is putrefied, blue with decay, falling apart, and dripping with sanies. For a long time the Commandants of the Bangi Station were obliged to post armed sentries on the cemetery of that place in order to protect newly buried corpses from the voracity of the Natives. When any one reproaches a Negro for his liking for decayed meat, he replies artlessly, " I don't eat the smell " ; but by some inexplicable inconsistency he makes a show of

<sup>1</sup> See p. 45.

contempt and disgust when he sees Europeans eating garlic, salad, or ripe cheese.

4. The chief occupation of the village is to catch wild animals and prepare their flesh. The principal domestic species—sheep, goats, and fowls—have no congeners in the wild state, and hence must be a very ancient loan from more advanced races. Since their introduction they have been disseminated from place to place amid difficulties which I have mentioned previously, and they now breed themselves as well as they can ; but they are scarce, and their meat is lean, tough, and ill-tasting.

The wild fauna is majestic and formidable, and man needs such apparatus as weapons, nets, and snares for the capture of big game. The problem has been greatly simplified since the introduction of firearms ; but when the Negro arsenal consisted only of the lance, the javelin, and the arrow hunting was a risky and dangerous game.

The equipment of the Negritos, whom I mentioned in Book I as the probable aborigines of Tropical Africa, is still confined to the latter weapons ; but they know how to creep noiselessly amid the underwood of the miry forest, and take their stand upon the outer edge of the boughs broken in some thicket by the shoulders of the elephants, whose gigantic size is shown by the tufts of hair hanging upon the raphia thorns and by the muddy stains impressed upon the trees when they brush against them. The little hunters half cover themselves with this dunghill of rotten leaves and worm-eaten wood, where they wait long hours in the animal stench of the elephant lairs. When the dim light of morning or evening shows the clumsy outlines of the great pachyderms in the greenish glimmer of the bush, the little man lets the herd go by ; but when he sees the last animal, the oldest elephant, which forms the rear-guard, the small hunter suddenly leaps between its legs, plunges a lance with a broad, barbed head

into its belly, and then with a bound conceals himself behind a tree from the rage of the wounded giant. This is but the first act of the tragedy, for the elephant dies very slowly unless some vital organ has been reached by the first blow. Away dashes the monster through the forest, and its little enemy must needs follow its trail, sometimes for one day, sometimes for two, harassing it all along the way, and getting possession of it only at a great distance from the starting-point. Then he must return to the village for reinforcements. The vast heap of flesh is cut up, as much as possible is smoked, and the booty is carried home after a gluttonous feast of meat has been enjoyed on the spot where the victory took place.

In spite of the elephant's great size, it is not as dangerous to hunt as the hippopotamus, and, above all, the wild ox. The people of the Middle Congo <sup>1</sup> have invented a sort of harpoon for hippopotamus-hunting. Its head, which is large and barbed, comes away from the shank, but remains attached to it by a long cord. The shank is buoyed up by a float, which shows the position of the victim; for a wounded hippopotamus dives under water, sinks to the bottom, and only reappears on the surface when swollen by the gases of putrefaction.

In the vast plains <sup>2</sup> several villages unite for hunting in the season. They fire the grass to windward of the district where game abounds, in such a way as to make a large circle of flame. The hunters then take their stand to leeward, holding long, stout nets, very like seines, or else armed with all sorts of staves and missiles, or even with sticks, and kill the animals with great slaughter as they emerge, maddened by the dark smoke and the crackling of the fire. For several days every one is stuffed with meat, and there is great

<sup>1</sup> On the River Mosaka.

<sup>2</sup> The Achikuya and Bateke plateaux, and the Sultanates of the Upper Mbomu.

rejoicing because the general hunger is so well appeased for once, and the stomachs of all are cloyed. During this time as much meat as possible is smoked, so that this happy period of feasting and gluttony may be prolonged. These annual massacres have many great disadvantages, for they are occasions of disorderly waste, during which the Negro gulps down meat until he has indigestion and even vomits. In fact, they are disgusting orgies which can be succeeded by nothing but the usual cruel privation.

The antelope's timidity and swiftness make it a difficult prey, but the tribes who inhabit districts covered with jungle,<sup>1</sup> where a battue is impracticable, know how to attract it within distance of the assagai by means of a call which they insert in the nose.

Traps are set to catch such large animals as the elephant, hippopotamus, and wild ox. I know only two kinds—the pit, whose principle is familiar to every one, and another more complicated plan which is really ingenious,<sup>2</sup> and of which the following is a brief description. A large and very heavy block, whose lower side is provided with a strong harpoon-head, is suspended from the branch of a tree, or a kind of portico built for the purpose, above the place where the animal generally passes. A liana, which keeps this suspended in the air, is fastened by a series of levers to another liana that is stretched across the path and acts as a spring. In crossing this the animal releases the sword of Damocles, the harpoon is buried in its back, and it takes to flight ; but its progress through the underbrush is impeded by the missile in its body, so that pursuit is easy and victory almost a certainty.

The Africans are less persevering in catching birds, which are protected by their small size and swiftness of flight from the attacks of their clumsy weapons ; for neither the bow of the Ubangi people nor even the Pawan crossbow is accurate enough to hit a target so

<sup>1</sup> The Kakas.

<sup>2</sup> Prevalent over the whole of Africa.

small and unsteady. The Natives who inhabit the clearings near the Mayombe have a rather ingenious way of catching small birds. Across these clearings, which are laid out in broad, branching roads, they stretch lianas at a height of several yards above the ground, between two upright posts, so that the whole apparatus looks like the thick network of telegraph wires beside the tracks of some great railway system. Snares made of lianas are suspended in hundreds from these cross-lines, in the chance hope that flocks of heedless little birds will come and be strangled in them.

Fishing is the most profitable industry of all. On the high plateaux of the interior, where the small watercourses dry up at the end of the rainy season, all the women of the village unite to build dams at the time when the water falls. The pools formed between two consecutive dams are afterwards emptied by means of calabashes, and the fish which are left on the dry land, and which have escaped to the deeper parts, are easily caught.

The Natives who live beside the great watercourses have developed the art of fishing to a high degree. Across their creeks they secure fish-traps which are exceedingly well made and which are about a yard and three-quarters in diameter, while they span the broad rivers with a sort of wickerwork stockade, so that the fish must enter through a single opening and fall into the fish-trap. It is quite an important piece of work, considering the state of their industrial advance, and is so stoutly built as to be actually dangerous to the hulls of French steamers.

The Natives of the Middle Ubangi generally use a curious sort of square dip-net. They place two long poles across a canoe, one at the bow and the other at the stern, and stretch a broad net from one to the other, fastening the loose ends of the two poles by lianas, which are held in the canoe by two men. When



these lianas are slackened and the canoe inclined, the net sinks into the water and the fish are then attracted to it by bait or otherwise. As soon as the fish are secured the men lay their weight on the opposite edge of the canoe to right it, at the same time hauling in the lianas and raising the net. They thus get both poles and net into a vertical position, and the catch falls of its own accord into the boat.

All the inhabitants of the village—men, women, and children, free and slave, dignitaries and clients—share in the work of hunting and fishing, which concerns all alike. These labours are often undertaken at certain definite seasons, and are public festivals and celebrations ; for they are not only expeditions intended to renew the store of provisions, but also partake of the nature of excursions and picnics. All able-bodied persons are required to take part in the great battues and fishing expeditions, and the dwellings are handed over to the care of the old, the sick, and the crippled, for even very young children are taken with the rest.

The party camps in huts made of leaves, and when the expedition is ended they all return home, after days of excitement and jollification, with full stomachs and hence with light hearts, while porters or canoes laden with smoked provisions accompany them. As a matter of course, the provisions are cured on the spot where the expedition takes place. For this purpose frames made of boughs are placed horizontally upon four stakes, and upon these are laid fish, which they do not clean, or quarters of meat, while fires of green wood are kept burning underneath until the process of drying and smoking is complete. I know very few Europeans with whom these horrid messes agree, for the meat becomes as hard as a piece of cardboard, and even prolonged cooking leaves it stringy and tough. It swarms with great gentles, and long hours after it has been eaten its empyreumatic and tainted flavour is recalled unpleasantly by the smell.

Whole tribes make a speciality of preparing and selling smoked fish. Such are the group whom the Natives of the Lower Congo call *Bafuru* or *Abfuru*, or, with a scornful insinuation, *Bayandzi* ("the savages"). They inhabit a district which is wonderfully well adapted for fishing, and which embraces the vast depression included in the Middle Congo above the Kasai and the lower stretches of the great rivers which flow into it. Such are also the riverain peoples of the Upper Ubangi.

5. Vegetable foods do not require such general co-operation on the part of the whole village. The clearing of forest lands and the felling of large trees are reserved for the male part of the population. One marvels at their adroitness in this sort of work, and at the quickness with which they bring down the giant forest trees, when one sees the more than rudimentary tool which they use. It is a hatchet, consisting of a short wooden club, whose thickest end is intersected by the tang of a simple iron blade, not more than three or four fingers wide. Propping their feet against the projections of the bark and wedging their loins into a strap which is placed around the trunk, two or three men attack the tree with quick, repeated blows and chip a hole in it, which they enlarge gradually, until finally the enormous mass falls, to the applause of the spectators. These felled trees remain where they are, not being removed even from ground which is selected for plantations, so that the manioc cuttings are set out among headless stumps and in a chaos of prostrate trunks and interlacing branches.

It is also the man's duty to collect the products of the palm and banana-trees, and to make palm-wine; but everything else devolves upon the woman, who has the care of the plantations and cultivated land, and who prepares meal, alimentary pastes, and oils. I shall not describe these familiar processes in detail,

but shall only mention them briefly, in order not to leave a gap in this picture of the native industries.

*Manihot utilisima*, as we know, includes two varieties, one sweet and the other bitter. The latter has violent toxic properties, due to the hydrocyanic acid which it contains, and hence its large farinaceous root cannot be eaten with safety unless it has first been steeped for a long time in running water. It is then kneaded and cooked, or else is left as meal and dried in the sun, in which form it may be kept a fairly long time. The favourite banana is the large variety, which is eaten boiled, roasted in the ashes, or in the form of meal. The oils of the *elais*, sesame, and ground-nut are not obtained by pressure, but by boiling the respective nuts and seeds in water and then pouring off the fatty substances which float to the surface. The seeds of sorghum and millet and the kernels of maize are ground between two stones and reduced to meals, from which pastes are made by kneading them with boiling water. These different seeds, and also the banana, are the base of various fermented beverages.

Negroes are extremely fond of Guinea pepper, which they mix profusely with almost all their food.

These different foodstuffs are not found everywhere in equal abundance. The manioc zone is approximately bounded on the north by the fifth degree of north latitude, and the banana-tree is confined to almost the same region. The potato is not widely diffused, but is found mainly in the coast district of Gabun. Plants which have edible seeds, like sorghum, millet, sesame, voandzeia, kidney-beans, and lupins, are almost exclusively confined to the pre-desert region. This is likewise the habitat preferred by the maize and ground-nut, though they are also found in small quantities in the damp districts of the south.

6. The mineral kingdom is very penurious with the African Negro. Sea-salt was unknown in the interior

until introduced by Europeans, and natural deposits of sodium chloride are very scarce and small. Jacques de Brazza found one in the Likuala-Mosaka Basin, and the Natives of the Upper Mbomu showed me a red earth which was the colour of brickdust and slightly salty to the taste ; but these are the only two places in the Congo—the coast, of course, excepted—where I know of the existence of this valuable substance. To season their food the Natives everywhere make use of a complicated mixture of chlorides and carbonates of soda and potash extracted by the incineration, lixiviation, filtration, and subsequent evaporation of different plants, especially the *pistia stratiotes*, which is very plentiful in marshy districts. This native salt comes in compact, blackish lumps, of a fibrous nature, and has a bitter and almost burning taste, which is very unpleasant.

Geophagy is not uncommon, but can be looked on only as a perversion of taste which satisfies the cravings of half-starved stomachs.

7. Generally speaking, Negroes prefer their own cookery to that of Europeans. A Negro servant will steal his white master's lard and tinned provisions, but only to use them in his own way ; and even cooks who eat the remnants from European tables never, I believe, adopt European cookery recipes, but prefer their traditional food, such as manioc, smoked fish, palm-oil, and quantities of condiments.

The Negro drinks little or nothing when he eats, but swallows a few mouthfuls of water after a meal, and then rinses his mouth and rubs his teeth with his index finger.

He is passionately fond of spirituous beverages, and alcoholism is making rapid progress wherever the Europeans have introduced the sale of distilled spirits. The liquors sold are pernicious grain-alcohols, which are adulterated with the most anomalous collection of

oddments by the greed of the retail merchants, some of whom, to my knowledge, go so far as to pour into their casks the waste petroleum from the lamps. Under the different names of tafia, gin, and absinthe, this poison is spreading rapidly into the interior, where it is sold or given in presents, and has caused whole sections of the native population to fall into the lowest depths of besottedness and physical and moral degradation.

Tobacco is used everywhere. At the fireside of an evening the pipe goes round from mouth to mouth ; each man takes a long pull and then passes it to his neighbour. But smoking is not practised to excess.

The same cannot be said for Indian hemp, the habit of indulging in which is making frightful progress. The smoking of this plant drives its victims literally mad, and they become so dangerous that their companions are occasionally obliged to bind them so that they may not do some damage.

#### D. CLOTHING.

It is not my plan to pass in review all the different costumes and kinds of ornament which the Natives of these torrid climates sport, for such a description would be picturesque rather than sociological. Considering what our purpose is, it will be more interesting to trace the general outlines of the evolution of fashion, as prescribed either by surrounding circumstances or the character of the Native.

The Eden-like simplicity of Negro costume seems to me to show that its original object was not decency. Its first idea, as it appears to me, was to afford the genital organs special protection from rough contact with surrounding objects. We shall find the demonstration of this theory in a rapid review of the successive stages by which dress took on a more and more complex character.

In the first place we see certain tribes living in the

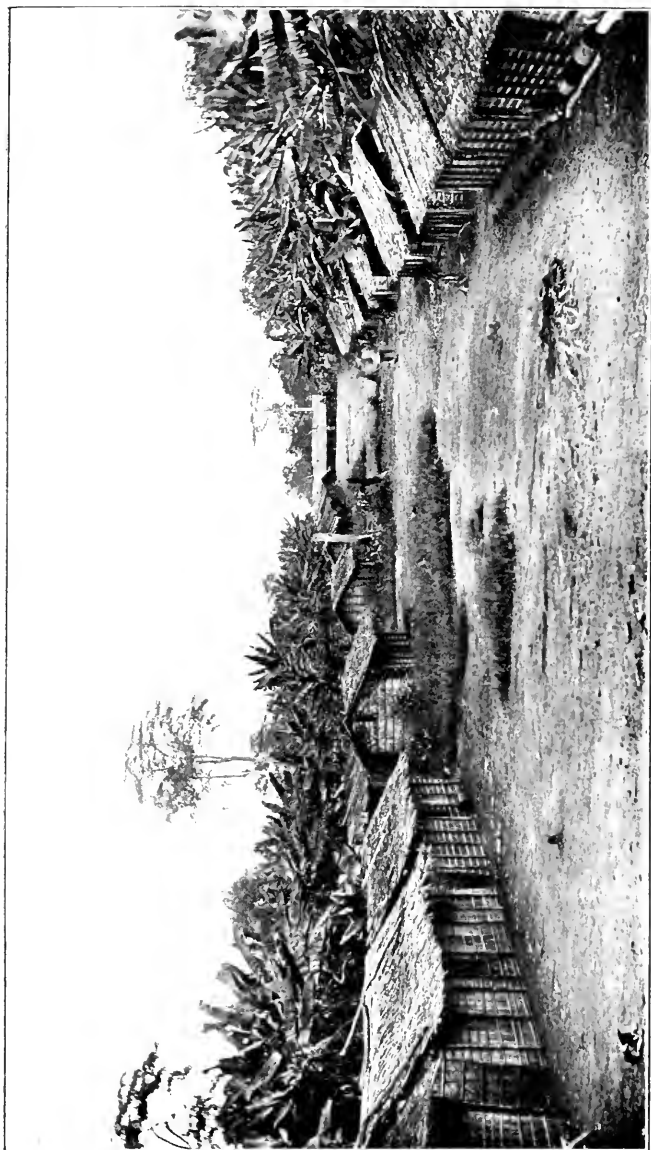
most complete state of nudity. Some <sup>1</sup> have no concern for the slightest accessory, and, indeed, make it a point of honour to avow their manhood openly, relegating clothes to the women as something degrading. At the very most they will only consent to hold an ox-hide or the skin of an antelope in front of them as a shield when they walk across the plains of the grass lands, where the dry and broken stubble of the tall grass causes wounds like any lance, and the leaves of certain marshy plants are as sharp as razors.

A first concern about dress is shown in the suspensory system adopted by other tribes.<sup>2</sup> It consists of a slender fibre, one portion of which is tied to the prepuce, while the other encircles the waist like a girdle. It is found that organs which are naturally sensitive must be reduced to immobility when a person has to walk through a district covered with underbrush and the sharp thorns of leguminous plants, while still more menacing external conditions necessitate more effectual restraint and protection of these same organs. In this latter case bands of fibre or beaten bark are employed, and are passed between the legs and confined back and front by a girdle of liana. This appliance accomplishes the desired end better than a simple band, for it both confines and protects a portion of the Negro's person which is usually very much developed, and at the same time it is a safeguard which defends his weak spot from the treacherous attacks of an enemy or an angry wife.

So much for the beginnings of masculine attire. But what was the fair half of humanity about all this time? Certainly woman's object could not have been the same, for she has almost nothing to fear from contact with external objects. Her first care is to pass a band beneath her arms in order to keep her breasts stationary, for from the time that she has her first child they become broad and unduly long and

<sup>1</sup> The Dinkas.

<sup>2</sup> The Biris.



*Plate XIII.*

A VILLAGE OF THE LOWER CAMPO.

To face page 230.





flaccid. Another matter of anxiety in her physique is the menstrual discharge, which, however, is less conspicuous than in the higher races, and can be concealed by a banana-leaf or packets of delicate greenery, which are very like bunches of cress.<sup>1</sup> At the next higher stage these perishable materials are replaced by others which are more durable. The skins of small carnivorous animals, such as civet-cats and genets,<sup>2</sup> are substituted for foliage which is soon soiled and wilted, and are suspended around the girdle in various ingenious combinations. Sometimes there is only one skin in front or at the back ; sometimes there are two, one in front and one behind ; and, lastly, fashionably draped skins sometimes form a complete circle, the animal's front paws fastening the skin to the girdle and the parti-coloured tails hanging down upon the legs of the smart lady like fringes.

But genets and civets do not abound in all districts, so for lack of raw materials something else had to be devised. At first packets of twisted fibres were used, one being placed in front and one behind<sup>3</sup> ; then sheets of flexible bark were arranged in the same way and worn as low down as the head of the femur,<sup>4</sup> because they were very short ; and finally, after passing through innumerable transitional stages, which I shall not mention, the Natives have ended by adopting a long cloth of flowing fibres, rolled around the pelvic region. Upon this are superposed several layers, so that the complete short garment looks rather like a ballet-dancer's tulle skirt. This skirt also is worn very low on the hips, and the alternate swing to right and left given it by the motion of the legs in walking lengthens the woman's waist disproportionately, and gives her an awkward and ungainly appearance which is extremely displeasing. This æsthetic disadvantage is forced upon the Natives by the small size of the materials, which are the longest

<sup>1</sup> Upper Ubangi and Mbomu.

<sup>2</sup> Dinkas and Zandes.

<sup>3</sup> Fan.

<sup>4</sup> Sanga.

they can obtain, and which they are unable to sew together and make into larger pieces. No matter how she tries, the stooping beauty can scarcely prevent her costume from becoming indiscreet, and when she is cooking the dinner or passing through the low doorway of her hut she must not forget to put her hand behind her and to press down the back part of her *cache-pudeur*.

When they arrive at this stage in dressmaking, masculine and feminine fashions soon coalesce, and tribes who have made some progress in manufacturing are able to weave the raw material of vegetable fibres into small squares of stiff, coarse cloth.<sup>1</sup> When they have improved to the utmost—of course before the introduction of European fabrics—the fibres are selected, cleaned, rolled upon the knee, bleached by exposure to the air, and then woven by hand, without a loom, but by tightening the weft as much as possible. The pieces of cloth thus obtained measure about twenty by twenty-four inches, and several of them are sewn together to make waist-cloths, which have fringed ends, and are large enough to cover a man's whole body,<sup>2</sup> and at the last stage the native craftsman has even acquired some idea of dyeing in black and red.

During the progress of this history of costume, nudity long continues to be permitted or tolerated in children of both sexes until they reach puberty ; but at its last stage, which we have now reached, adults in good society must be clothed, and thus we see introduced into manners and customs, perhaps not what we call modesty, but at least a habit of concealing parts which may now be beginning to be considered shameful. The origin of this new sentiment appears to me complicated and open to debate, nor could it be investigated without a fairly long discussion, which would be quite out of place in this work.

<sup>1</sup> On the Middle Corgo.

<sup>2</sup> Bateke, Bakongo.

The use of head coverings is almost unknown, though in certain districts <sup>1</sup> one sees caps which consist of the entire skin of some small animal. They are worn lengthwise, and are shaped like a muff, with the paws falling over the temples and behind the head.

The place of the hat is generally taken by thick helmets made of the hair itself, whose frizzled wool is interwoven with various gew-gaws, especially glass and porcelain beads and cowries, to which are added quantities of palm-oil and camwood powder, and, among certain tribes, potters' earth, all of which are worked into the structure. The form of these helmets is the characteristic mark of the various tribes. It is impossible to name, still less to describe, their innumerable and fantastic varieties, but we may mention the Fan's crested helmet, which is often surmounted by a tuft of parrot feathers; the Gautier-Garguille wig, which, among the Bombasa, has long horns curved forward, backward, and sideways; the skull-cap of the people on the Upper Ubangi, with its sides of many-coloured beads; the Nzakaras' morion, with its broad edges; and the halo of the Digas and the Mbio Zandes.

There is no trace anywhere of footgear except in the extreme north, where the Natives import leather sandals and Turkish slippers with pointed, turned-up toes.

The ornamental is gradually added to the useful, and decoration comes to enliven the indispensable; for the love of finery, especially in woman, who has an innate leaning that way, follows general mental development, and more particularly that of the æsthetic sense. Related crafts come into existence, first among them that of the hairdresser and the jeweller, for the lady of fashion will allow no one but the local Léonard to enhance her beauty by a cleverly arranged headdress,

<sup>1</sup> Ogowé, Sanga.

a complicated structure of hair, cowries, fibres, wooden frames, potters' earth, and palm-oil ; while who else save a Kiteke Cellini can weave into a braid, and then curve into the form of a bracelet, the triple wire of iron, red copper, and brass which is the future mark of some chief's greatness?

Everything that the arts and crafts of mankind owe to the use of clothing and ornamentation may be summed up under the following heads : the preparation of the skins of animals, the selection and preparation of the raw material of vegetable fibres, the selection, extraction, and preparation of textile fabrics, spinning and carding,<sup>1</sup> weaving, dyeing, sewing, and, lastly, the goldsmith's art, if I may use this etymological misnomer, since in this case none but the base metals are concerned. Let us remark, by the way, that the fleece of animals is used only in its natural state, for the hair of the Congo species is too short to be sheared and worked up.

#### E. FURNITURE, UTENSILS, AND TOOLS.

The first concern of primitive man was to satisfy his hunger, then to shelter himself from the inclemency of the weather, and, lastly, to protect his person from the attacks of external agents ; but had he been reduced to his personal resources and his own strength alone, he could never have brought all this to a successful conclusion. Moreover, it is natural that when a man has obtained the necessities he should seek comforts and then superfluities ; so that the demands created by his wants are for ever mounting the rounds of a ladder which leads from indigence to luxury, and at this last stage luxury itself becomes a necessity.

<sup>1</sup> Reading "cardage" instead of "cordage" as the French text has it.—*Trans.*

It was not long before primitive man found the ground so hard that he could not rest upon it, whether he sat or lay, while sometimes it was too damp for him and at other times too dry and dusty. His thirst, too, was not easy to quench when he simply took water from a brook in the hollow of his hand, and besides, it was only when he was near a fountain or a stream that he could drink at all in this way ; so that even a leaf rolled into a cornet meant progress, as did his discovery of the fact that the leathery covering of certain large fruits would hold water and permit of its being carried. Again, he found that leaves tightly tied about a mess of meat and bananas resisted the heat of fire and helped to cook a meal <sup>1</sup>—a primitive process which is commonly employed in camp, but whose inconvenience and numerous imperfections make it unsuitable for the domestic kitchen.

Man's ingenuity, stimulated by necessity and the desire for comfort, set itself to extracting from wood, earth, and metal such utensils as should be adapted to increase his natural resources or supply their deficiencies ; but it will never be known whether these inventions sprang up spontaneously in Africa or were foreign importations. According to the latter theory, they were diffused over the Congo Basin by the Bantu expansion, but there is no objection to the admission that they may have pre-existed among the aborigines of these parts, and this immediately entails the other hypothesis, which holds that certain inventions may have appeared simultaneously at different spots on the globe. As a matter of fact, many ordinary utensils are nothing but imitations of natural objects in the beginning, and several men, who were veritable geniuses for their time, may have devised a way of copying a gourd or a calabash in potters' clay quite independently of one another.

<sup>1</sup> The Negro thus performs the well-known trick experiment of boiling water in a paper box over a spirit lamp.

The furniture, utensils, and tools of all the African tribes are much alike, and it will be enough for me to give here as complete a list of them as possible, without a detailed description, which would be quite superfluous. It is of the utmost importance in this investigation that the reader should be placed in a position where he may visualize correctly the life of a portion of mankind which is interesting because of its remoteness from ourselves in point of time, and that his mind should not be diverted by digressions which are either too technical or merely picturesque.

In the following list it will be noticed how few and defective are the tools for working wood and metals. As far as wood is concerned, the Negro has no tools save those for cutting and hewing. He is ignorant of saws, planes, hammers, nails, and tools for drilling. For metals he has only the hammer and anvil, which are both alike and are shaped like a small elongated lump, at one end of which is a flattened head tapering to a blunt point at the opposite end. This is held in the hand when the tool is used for hammering, and is fixed into a block when it is to be employed as an anvil. The article to be forged is heated red-hot in a charcoal fire, which is blown by a bellows. There are no shears, files, tongs, nippers, nor any tool for drilling, and the article which is being worked is merely fixed on the end of a little stick for a moment when it has to be handled. With this rudimentary tool-chest the native workman succeeds in making comparatively complicated objects in iron and copper. Not only does he extract iron from the ore, but he welds it himself, twists it into a spiral, beats it flat, gives the metal plates a uniform thickness, and makes striations and indentations indicating a form of art which is certainly rude and barbarous, but which nevertheless shows a concern for beauty and symmetry.

NAMES OF PROPERTY, FURNITURE, UTENSILS,  
TOOLS, ETC.

I. HUMAN BEINGS.

1. Free women. 2. Girls. 3. Slaves of both sexes : (a) servants ;  
(b) for slaughter, among cannibal tribes.

II. ANIMALS.

4. Kids, sheep. 5. Hogs. 6. Fowls. 7. Ducks. 8. Dogs.

III. REALTY (TEMPORARY).

9. Land occupied by dwellings and devoted to agriculture  
10. Dwellings. 11. Offices.

IV. PERSONAL PROPERTY.

A. *Goods.*

- A. CLOTHING. 12. Cap of skin. 13. Fibre skirt. 14. Waist-cloth  
of beaten bark.

- B. ORNAMENTS. 15. Tuft of feathers. 16. Helmet of hair, beads,  
and cowries. 17. Necklaces of copper, beads, etc. 18. Armlets.  
19. Bracelets. 20. Anklets. 21. Finger and toe rings. 22. Ear, nose,  
and lip rings. 23. Hairpins. 24. Wooden or ivory disks, quartz  
crystals, and copper or iron nails for insertion in the mutilations of the  
nose, lips, or ears.

- C. TOILET ARTICLES. 25. Combs. 26. Combination pin and pen-  
knife (an implement which ends in a short blade at one extremity  
and is long and pointed at the other). 27. Back-scratcher. 28. Fly-  
brush. 29. Refined oil and perfumes. 30. Camwood ointment.

- D. NURSERY AND MEDICINE. 31. Strap for carrying the child.  
32. Gourd for ablution. 33. Small calabash for cupping. 34. Various  
drugs.

- E. INSIGNIA. 35. Necklace. 36. Bracelet. 37. Walking-stick.

- F. FURNITURE. 38. Beds made of earth, billets, or strips of palm-  
tree. 39. Wooden or basket-work pillow. 40. Solid stools.  
41. Hollow stools which form boxes. 42. Mats. 43. Baskets made of  
twigs or wicker-work.

- G. KITCHEN UTENSILS. (a) *Unmanufactured.* 44. Calabashes.  
45. Gourds. 46. Small sticks and tow to start the fire. 47. Pestle for  
grinding grain.

- (b) *Manufactured Wood.* 48. Mortar. 49. Pestle. 50. Kneading-  
trough. 51. Plates.

- (c) *Wicker-work.* 52. Baskets. 53. Sieve. 54. Screens and driers.

- (d) *Earthenware.* 55. Cooking pots. 56. Jars. 57. Porous water-  
jugs.

(e) *Iron*. 58. Knife.

H. TOOLS. (a) *Agricultural Implements*: 59. Hoe. 60. Chopper. 61. Wooden or iron bells for animals.

(b) *In Wood*. 62. Axe. 63. Adze. 64. Spokeshave. 65. Knife.

(c) *In Metal*. 66. Furnace for smelting ore. 67. Bellows of wood and skin, with an earthenware nozzle. 68. Anvil. 69. Hammer.

I. WEAPONS. (a) *Of Offence*. 1. *Shafted*. 70. Stick and Club. 71. Cutlass and dagger, with or without scabbard. 72. Sabres or scimitars of very different shapes. 73. Lance. 2. *Missiles*. 74. Javelin (assagai). 75. Knife for throwing (Troumbache). 76. Bow and arrows. 77. Cross-bow and arrows (among the Fans only). 78. Poison for arrows.

(b) *Of Defence*. 79. Breastplate of skins. 80. Wicker-work shield.

J. IMPLEMENTS FOR HUNTING AND FISHING. (a) *Hunting*. Weapons as above. 81. Boar-spear. 82. Harpoon. 83. Elephant traps. 84. Rat-traps. 85. Nets. 86. Calls.

(b) *Fishing*. 87. Nets. 88. Fish-traps.

K. RELIGION. 89. Feather cap. 90. Amulets. 91. Statuettes. 92. Bells.

L. TRANSPORT. (a) *Land*. 93. Long hamper (muntete, only in the Lower Congo). 94. Head-pad. 95. Back-basket. 96. Strap. 97. Staff.

(b) *Water*. 98. Canoe. 99. Paddles (a sort of oar, either long or short). 100. Pole. 101. Canoe-bells (on the Middle Ubangi).

M. SMOKERS' ACCESSORIES. 102. Tobacco and pipe. 103. Indian hemp and the peculiar pipe used for smoking it.

N. MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS. (a) *Percussive Instruments*. 104. Drums of all sizes. 105. Xylophone (balafo).

(b) *Played by Plucking the Strings*. 106. Harp-like instruments of very varied shapes.

(c) *With Vibrating Plates of Metal*. 107. A small instrument consisting of iron plates, on the Lower Congo.

(d) *Wind Instruments*. 108. Reed flutes (Central Africa). 109. Ivory trumpets (very rare).

(e) *Unclassified*. 110. Notched sticks. 111. Hollow fruits or tubes, with seeds inside.

O. DANCING. Various kinds of finery. 112. Mask.

P. GAMES. 113. Pebbles, cowries, or potsherds, used as bones or dice. 114. A kind of backgammon.

#### B. Money.

115. Cloth. 116. Brass wire (mitako). 117. Spiral spring coiled in the form of a cylinder, and made of fine brass. 118. Sea-salt. 119. Shovels and hoes. 120. Iron plates of various shapes. 121. A sort of double bell. 122. Iron bars.



## F. OCCUPATIONS.

The rapid excursion which we have just taken through a bit of still living history has shown us man emerging from a state of complete indigence and mounting the first rounds of the ladder of progress, one by one. In the beginning he satisfies wants that are necessary for the conservation of the individual and the race, and subsequently he invents convenient processes and implements, which increase his resources and consequently enable him to accomplish greater and better results. The personal share which he thus donates, his physiological wear and tear, as I may say, decreases in proportion, and as this is an important item in physiological economy which has seldom been pointed out, it will not be unprofitable to emphasize it incidentally.

"Life consumes life" is the condensed form in which I may express this principle. The preservation, development, and expansion of an individual are at the expense of the individual himself; for the operations of the animal mechanism, although largely nourished by the ingestion of various combustibles, do not fail to cause a deterioration of the organism which serves as the intermediary and scene of the transformation of energy.

Let us now confront this first principle with that other one which says that man's physical object—taking no account of his moral self—is to extend his life in quantity, quality, and duration. These two principles, taken together, give rise to a real problem of maximum and minimum; for if man does nothing, he soon succumbs to physical and moral inanition; while if he exceeds the limits of his strength he speedily consumes his physical organism and arrests his growth, with the result that decay supervenes in this case too. Between these two extremes a well-balanced person will know how to find the golden mean, which signifies that while a given individual, who lives at a definite time, is expending the minimum of energy, he is at the same time

and under the most favourable circumstances obtaining the maximum length, fullness, and grandeur of life, while a different proportion, in which the ingredients are either increased or decreased, can only be detrimental.

In the great mass of mankind, individuals, or groups of individuals, may deviate from this law ; but the whole body will submit to it, for progress is made in its own good time, consuming people who are too hurried and crushing the laggards. It has periods of lethargy and periods of madness too, and is like a river which rushes headlong or slackens its course, according to the elevations and depressions of the country through which it flows, but never changes its total volume.

It took longest to climb the first steps. An enormous period of preparation necessarily led up to the stages which come within the compass of our investigation, and which are already the second or third, though they seem low enough to our European eyes, which are dazzled by modern arts and crafts. Civilized man is so pampered by the conveniences and pleasures lavished upon him by the artificial world in which he lives that he has grown to consider them as natural as the air he breathes. In certain respects it cannot be denied that he is right ; but he has lost the memory of his race's first dawn. The history of those who have been cut off from mankind has been written by a Defoe, a Saintine, a Jules Verne, and many others who have considered it from the different points of view of religion, science, and anecdote ; but who is to write the philosophical romance of Robinson Crusoe ? A man must once have been alone in the heart of wild Nature, and quite destitute, if he would appreciate the true value of a bottle, a cork, a match, a pin, or any implement for fishing or the chase. When the centre of Africa was connected with Europe by at least six months of travelling on foot or by canoe, and when even this sort of transport was slow and uncertain,

those who lived in the interior knew privations for which the greatest exertions of ingenuity offered poor compensation, or none at all. How wretched it was when one was far from the haunts of men, and had no fire ! How difficult it was to procure a hard pallet, a rough table, and a few clumsy, rickety chairs, and how long it took to get them ! Exiled as we were, and out of touch with civilization, the results of our skill were often ridiculously small, clumsy, and out of proportion to the effort they entailed. The prehistoric civilization of those parts puzzled European ingenuity, and when the chain was once broken, we were thrown willy-nilly into the state of society which actually surrounded us. Sticks rubbed together took precedence of our matches ; an ear of maize stripped of its kernels replaced a cork stopper, and a broken canoe furnished us with boards, or rather flat pieces of wood. We were obliged to adapt our way of life to native furniture and utensils, borrowing our beds, cooking-pots, calabashes, water-jars, and mats from the Natives. Our remoteness from our normal life made us like primitive men, but like primitive men who were ill-fitted for their surroundings ; and, by a strange turn, we, the men of to-day, had everything to learn from the men of yesterday—the Natives.

I have indulged in these reflections because they seem useful in order to set the African Negroes once more in their proper relation to ourselves ; but let us now return to our subject.

At the beginning of social life every individual is a jack-of-all-trades, and this is the state to which we Europeans found ourselves reduced when we first occupied the Congo. But when man is alone and reduced to his natural resources only, his capacity for production is limited by the threefold weaknesses of lack of time, lack of strength, and lack of knowledge.

As soon as the bi-sexual couple is made a permanent

institution, the first division of labour between man and woman takes place spontaneously. Generally speaking, His Masculine Majesty takes the lion's share, reserving to himself idleness, palavers, and most outside matters, but condescending from time to time to perform labour which is impossible for his companion because of her natural weakness. He relegates to his wife the daily tasks and small duties of life, which he soon learns to consider degrading. As the family enlarges, the workers increase in number, while the intellectual capacities and inclinations of the various members also grow and become differentiated.

Social arithmetic appears to contradict mathematical arithmetic ; for the sum total of the results obtained by an increasing number of persons who participate in any given work increases in a proportion which is greatly superior to this number itself. The paradox is only a seeming one, however, for the whole matter reduces itself to a question of utilization.<sup>1</sup> It is the same in mechanics ; for one hundred-horse-power engine yields a far greater result than a hundred one-horse-power engines put to the same piece of work. There are many reasons for this : less loss by heat, less friction, better utilization of the inertia of the bodies in motion, etc. Primitive man has instinctively perceived this truth in the sphere of the regular public labours of his small communities. He has discovered the elementary but essential law that an individual who specializes in a single occupation attains a degree of skill, dexterity, and rapidity in his speciality to which the man who is most gifted in other lines cannot lay claim at the same time with his other equal talents. A man who is led by inclination to devote himself to a definite occupation is

<sup>1</sup> Throughout this passage I do not claim to be rewriting one of the most well-established chapters of political economy; but in this monograph on African sociology it seems to me profitable to show that these propositions are all verified herein, and are actually, though not explicitly, accepted by the primitive races whom we are investigating.

satisfying a natural want, an innate propensity, and hence accomplishes his work in the fullness of his physical and intellectual powers. His self-esteem is involved in his success, from which he hopes for approval and praise, and he is impelled to gratify this inclination just as a chemical substance has an unconquerable impulse to satisfy its affinities. He offers himself to it with all the strength of his will, and does not fear to undertake the heaviest task. The community which possesses within itself several persons of such a vocation has a real treasure, from which it will derive unquestioned pre-eminence, but only on the express condition that there be reciprocity between all its members. When this happens the collectivity becomes comparable, as a body, to the isolated man of the first period, who included all occupations in his own person ; but it is now a complex entity, whose inclinations, manual skill, ideas, and swiftness of execution have increased in large proportion.

If we add together all the efforts put forth by the individuals of a community, the mathematical weights of these separate contributions are not equal, because the members of the community are not all alike in intelligence and physical strength ; or, if you like, the *quality* of one man's contribution is not equivalent to that of the next man. Given an equal effort, the share of one man is much more valuable than that of another, because he brings a very much greater sum of benefits to the community. The skilful builder of a canoe renders his fellow-citizens a much more valuable service than does the man who paddles the canoe, because his talent makes the second man's work possible and thus considerably enlarges the sphere of action of the village, and facilitates the expansion of the community's life.

It is advisable to emphasize this other important point : that in a given group of men numbers are only conditionally a guarantee of pre-eminence. It is the

sense of close responsibilities, in the form of an idéal which is shared by all, that alone creates organic unity in the social body. It is only by virtue of this union, by this fusion of individual members into a homogeneous whole, that the strength of the complex organism can be, to a higher degree than the unit, the function of the number of the elements of which it is composed.

I have previously given an outline of Negro occupations. They are not as sharply defined as one might think from the names which I have been forced to give them in order to be intelligible to the reader. In our advanced society, the task of each member is growing more and more specialized, and activity becomes more feverish as it decreases in extent. In the prehistoric period, which is exemplified in the Natives of Central Africa, no one citizen's occupation has any exact definition, for no individual is closely identified with a trade, which is often practised only upon occasions, and when there is need of it.

#### G. COMMERCE.

Specialization of labour does not stop at the individual, but extends from one man alone to associations of men, and an entire village or tribe may prefer to exploit some one branch of Negro activity. These bodies are induced to specialize by some sort of pressure, which may take the form of racial inclinations, or of certain local, geographical, climatic, or other conditions that have given the nature and inclinations of the people who inhabit a certain district an orientation to correspond. The Natives of one region, for instance, live in a copper-producing country, and so are naturally induced to dig up the ore and extract the metal ; while another tribe lives on the banks of a great river, and by necessity and the very force of circumstances has become a race of sailors and fishermen.

Soon, however, the same state of mutual dependence

which we have seen arise within the village between individuals of different aptitudes and occupations begins to spread from tribe to tribe. Village A cultivates manioc, but does not fish, while Village B has fish, but little or no manioc. To satisfy the wants of both, A has only to produce more manioc than it requires, and to exchange the superfluous product for the fish which it has not, while B does the same inversely. This is the theoretical birth of commerce, which needs only transport to make it quite practical ; for A's manioc cannot serve B's purpose unless it is conveyed from A to B either in an uninterrupted trip or by successive stages.

Negro Africa offers examples of all methods of transport, some of which are direct and others indirect, or effected by means of middlemen. At the first stage the producer tribe itself undertakes the transport of the product which it manufactures ; at the second stage there is a division of labour between the producer and the carrier within the tribe or the village ; while at the third stage there are tribes which make transport by land or water a speciality, either because particular facilities for portage or navigation are afforded by the districts in which they live, or because the barrenness of their native soil leaves them no other alternative, and they are forced to play the part of commercial middlemen.

In districts where extreme natural difficulties have hitherto prevented the building of roads, and where no beasts of burden exist or seem able to exist, the water-course, "the road which walks," is the simplest and most practical route, and thanks to the extensive network of rivers, canals, lakes, and swamps in the interior of Africa, many tribes which are very remote from one another maintain constant business relations. On the immense navigable reaches of the Equatorial Congo canoes of venturesome tribes have plied from remote antiquity, bringing the smoked fish, ivory, and slaves of the interior down to Stanley Pool and receiving in

exchange copper, native cloth, and also the European goods which had been painfully carried over narrow tracks from the distant coast.

On the plateaux where the watercourses are not navigable, and the land route is therefore compulsory, the lack of beasts of burden has forced the tribes to transport their goods on men's heads. This is fatiguing work when the sun blazes down and the tracks are uneven and ill-trodden. It cannot be accomplished in one stretch, and during the frequent halts the merchandise is incessantly set down and taken up again, and cannot but suffer from the constant handling, which is repeated a hundred times a day. The porters fall and their loads roll into the ravines, while alternate sun and rain distress the caravan ; nor can the loads always be protected from a wetting when rivers are crossed, and it may be imagined in what condition the goods arrive at their destination.

I have already had occasion to remark <sup>1</sup> that the Negro assigns no value to time or work considered in themselves. These two factors of price long remained purely abstract terms, and hence were quite disregarded. The African does not know how to estimate the loss or expense which he sustains under this head, but assigns a price only to the concrete object, considered as such, and in sole proportion to its utility and to the use for which it is intended. Conceptions of time and work are nevertheless sometimes forced upon him, and in a way, in spite of himself, as we see when he uses water for transport. For instance, he requires two weeks to bring his goods down river from some part of the interior, while he needs six or eight to make the return trip. The articles which he is transporting depreciate on the way, for the canoes ship water, which spoils them, a part of the cargo is eaten up by the crew, another portion is sold to the riverain tribes in exchange for fresh provisions, and yet a third is stolen

<sup>1</sup> See p. 150.



by pillagers. In short, when the merchant arrives at his journey's end his stock in hand has diminished in both value and quantity ; but it is quite otherwise with the expectations which he has founded on the sale of the cargo, and therefore he must endeavour to fulfil these anticipations, which were based upon the entire cargo before he left home, and this even though the quantity of his merchandise is greatly diminished. He thus ends by valuing his wares more highly on the return trip than when he came down river, for the time and exertion of transporting them have impressed him, not as such, but indirectly, by the repercussion of the losses which he has suffered *en route*. Still, this solves only a part of the problem.

In this primitive condition of nature the direction taken by trade-routes which follow the land is closely connected with the orography of the country, and that of the water-routes with its hydrography, and from this fact these routes derive two peculiarities. In the first place this direction is compulsory ; for natural obstacles are not directly attacked in this rudimentary state of commercial activity, and the law of least effort is applied to its fullest extent. The second peculiarity is that the long-distance routes, which alone concern us, are linear. They do not branch out into networks, but are great commercial highways, which are intended to link distant regions. Now along these lines of inter-communication the cargo is exposed to repeated levies from the riverain tribes, for the villages situated between stages will not give a transit-pass until they have compelled the carrier to do business with them. Generally speaking, the caravans are not pillaged, and, indeed, nothing is seized ; for the Natives are relatively honest, though not from any innate virtue, but for fear lest commerce should turn aside and take some safer road. The merchant, however, is obliged to halt and show his small stock, and though his prices are disputed, the tribes generally pay.

Sometimes a restraint takes place in due form, and, though the property of the stranger is respected, he is absolutely forbidden to proceed on his way. The Ogowe is a broad river interspersed with rapids, through which tribes who are skilful at paddling can guide their canoes, and it takes forty days to go up-stream from Ndjole to Franceville, though only eight are required to descend this impetuous torrent. These circumstances long placed the commerce of the Ogowe under the power of the Fan nation. One of their villages would explicitly refuse to let wares from the coast pass its customs barrier, and would force the wretched merchants to transact business in front of the village and under the jealous superintendence of its chiefs. Hence the goods from down-stream reached the interior only after they had been sifted through numerous intermediaries, and in like manner ivory, ebony, and rubber were exchanged a thousand times before they arrived at the coast. When European trading companies ventured into the interior, these tribes continued to deal with the White Men just as they had formerly done with their own congeners, and compelled the European firms to keep establishments in certain specified places, forbidding them, under pain of warlike proceedings, to remove up-river. The European agent was respected, and his storehouses, far from being disturbed, were rigidly protected by the village warriors ; but he was the agent of the village, and his shop was the shop of the village. The merchant was the prisoner of the tribe, and found himself invested with a forced monopoly.

In many districts where there is transport by land only, and especially in those where slavery does not exist, articles of commerce are not generally distributed by long stages, but from place to place, or, as I may say, from hand to hand. Under these circumstances the sphere of any article of commerce is very limited, and the area of diffusion of any product is very restricted. Merchandise does not travel far and is unequally distributed.

In regions, however, where there is easy transport by water, or where slave-labour facilitates land transport, the radius of distribution is very extensive, and the places where producer and consumer meet gradually grow farther apart. These places are selected for their geographical or ethnical suitability, which may consist either in the confluence of two important rivers, or a cataract where some watercourse ceases to be navigable, or the edge of a forest which forms a frontier shared by a forest tribe and a tribe of the steppes, or a hill which constitutes an orographic nucleus at the junction of two or more basins and is a natural meeting-place for the valley roads. Permanent or temporary markets are held in these chosen spots.

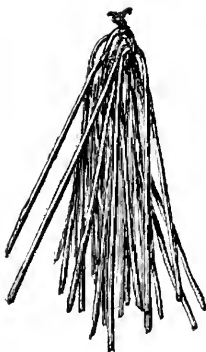
The market is one of the most fixed institutions among these tribes, who are so inconstant in manners and customs and in habitat. It owes its stability to natural causes, such as the primordial interests of primitive man, or some favourable geographical situation, which are factors that are either essentially unchangeable or else vary with extreme slowness. "They are established according to district," says one of my correspondents,<sup>1</sup> "and their importance varies with the amount of the population in each district. They are established when the surrounding population feels a need of them, and after due discussion by the elders and chiefs of the various groups. When a market is set up between two different communities, one or more chiefs belonging to each are appointed to decide how it shall be carried on, to fix prices, and to see that it is properly policed. Market-palavers are very seldom brought before the Administrator. In two years I had only one case to decide, and upon that occasion I was enabled to realize the importance which the Natives attach to the freedom with which business is transacted in these markets. . . ."

The market is held in a cleared square, which is

<sup>1</sup> Administrator de Mostuéjols.

usually situated in some lofty spot. The grass is trampled down, and is always covered with a most anomalous collection of fragments, such as baskets with the bottoms knocked out, leaves for wrapping manioc, potsherds, tattered waist-cloths and charred logs. No watchman save the wild wind of the tornado keeps the place clean. Here it is that the women unpack their great baskets and open the bales which contain the products of native husbandry and manufacture. Near these humble costermongers, merchants in a larger way have their meeting-place, to which they bring slaves, ivory, and rubber, the one carrying the others. It is a noisy, merry crowd in the hot sunshine, where the facetious exchange broad jests and a caravan of porters, covered with sweat and mud, marches in and comes to a stop. One may see a female merchant protecting her smoked fish and dried meat from the attempts of a starveling dog and the attacks of some shameless kites, which swoop down from the sky ; while over yonder are gamblers, risking their last waist-cloths on bits of crockery, which they throw into the air with shrill cries and a great snapping of fingers. Groups of women stand about gossiping and slandering their neighbours, boys roll in the dust, which is swarming with vermin, and a hungry man hastily cooks bits of tainted carrion in a filthy pot. A stranger gesticulates wildly and talks some jargon of his own, in an effort to make a native merchant understand him. The whole is a jarring uproar, a hubbub of all sorts of languages and onomatopœic sounds, a blend of disagreeable smells from sweat, smoke, stews, spoiled meat, tobacco, latrines, intoxicating perfumes, and the poisonous fumes of Indian hemp, all of which are rancidified, melted, matured, and sublimated by the baking noonday heat.

There was an ancient period in the history of these native markets, which was prior to the coming of the Europeans, and whose pure type is consequently unknown to any one of us, though the earliest explorers



On the Middle  
Congo.



On the Middle Ubangi.



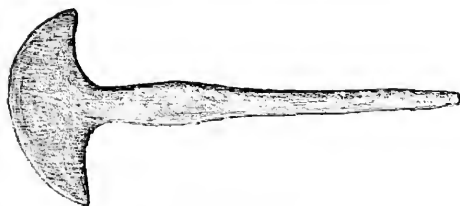
On the Upper  
Ubangi.



On the Middle  
Sanga.



On the Middle  
Sanga.



On the Middle Sanga.



On the Upper  
Ubangi.



can no doubt imagine it with a fair degree of correctness. At that time native taste and wants alone regulated the selection of the kind of merchandise to be sold. Chronologically it was a period which corresponded to the last stage of Negro arts and manufactures, as I have described it, when markets began to be set up as meeting-places between such villages or tribes as had specialized in one of the branches of production. Here one saw copper and slave converging, as well as smoked fish and manioc, groundnuts and iron money, pottery and canoes. From those now distant days when the slave-dealers approached the coast seeking cargoes of living ebony for lands beyond the sea, a great current began to flow from the middle of the continent towards both oceans. This stream formed into long links of alternate stages and markets, which were traversed in one direction by slaves for export and in the other by gewgaws for import. When the anti-slavery campaign stopped the export of human cattle, their place was taken by ivory and a small quantity of rubber, and the latter has become the preponderant item in the traffic since the weary burden of man-porterage has given way to improved methods of transport, and European merchants have gone into the heart of the country in search of this product.

*Mediums of Exchange and Money.*—The mechanism of exchange in these primitive states of society is fundamentally based upon barter, and the process is so well known that I need sketch only its main outlines. It arises from the principle of specialization and division of labour of which I have previously spoken, and from the respective wants of individuals who are at once producers and consumers. The equivalence of the articles exchanged is established according to the nature and intensity of these wants, for the discussions of bargaining belong to all ages and all lands. Rebela, we will say, wishes some dried hippopotamus to season

his manioc, while Orondo desires some of Rebela's palm-oil to dress his smoked fish, which he cannot eat otherwise. This is a simple form of exchange, and the equivalence of the two products will easily be determined by a few discussions.

But here is a more complicated case. Kamangu comes to buy manioc from Mabyala. He is from a mining district, and offers Mabyala some copper rods, which the latter does not want, as he has no use for them. Still, he wishes to make something out of his manioc, and dislikes taking it back to his own village, where the supply of it exceeds the demand, and it will go to waste. Now he knows that although the copper is useless to him other persons want it, so that they may work it up, and he is aware that he can probably exchange it in some neighbouring market for salt, which he needs to season the fish he has just bought from Ngandu. So Mabyala takes Kamangu's copper, though the use of this medium makes it a little more complicated to fix the equivalence of the different values concerned. If this representative commodity, which merely passes through the market, is only plentiful enough, it may serve as the general standard for estimating the value of all the other products which are there assembled. Here then, finally, is a substance which locally does not derive its value from a direct and immediate want, but from the purely moral conviction that it is susceptible of being utilized anywhere at some future time. It represents, in a way, the postponed satisfaction of a real want, and its value will be acknowledged by the middlemen who pass it on from one to the other, only if it can be used at all times in a concrete form.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> All these things will seem so commonplace to the reader that he will think I might very well have dispensed with the mention of them even in order to apply them to Negro society ; but it must not be thought that they are as self-evident as they seem. Not long ago I knew some good souls in the Congo who seemed to ascribe to French



Here we have money in the very act of becoming such. When the Europeans came into the country the system of exchange had not progressed beyond the stage which I have just been describing. The medium was not yet money, but it was already more than merchandise. Nevertheless, it is important to note two points as paving the way for future progress. In the first place the merchandise which acted as medium had come to assume a characteristic and special shape, which was often original and took the form of hoes, axes, or shovels, blades of swords, cutlasses or scimitars, plaques shaped like spades in playing-cards, double bells, etc. (Plate XIV), all of which were intended to facilitate the transformation of the circulating medium into ordinary implements. It is interesting to note, in the second place, that very often these mediums of exchange were not used for the purpose for which they were intended, but continued to circulate as money until they were lost or completely consumed.

Money of exclusively native origin is all metallic and all of base metal, which gives it a Lacedemonian weight and bulkiness. Beads and shells, which were also used as money, are of foreign importation, and the precious metals are not found anywhere in the native form.

*Measures.*—In Tropical Africa there is no unit of capacity or weight, so that articles can only be guessed at. The one unit of length for cloth and for metal wire is the fathom, which is the length between the tips of the fingers when both arms are stretched out sideways. This unit has only one submultiple—the half-fathom, which is the length from the breastbone to the tip of money some value of its own, some magic virtue which should have made the Natives accept it in a trice, without any counterpart in the form of consumable articles. It has even been attempted to compel its use by force. And we have had the spectacle of the Negroes sometimes not knowing what to do with this useless counter, and hence thinking that they were wronged when they received it as payment, and sometimes demanding a five-franc piece for an egg.

the middle finger. It is funny to watch the efforts of two parties to a negotiation, and to see the seller trying to make his arms shorter, while the buyer attempts to spread his out as widely as possible. Sometimes they ask for assistance from a dwarf and a giant respectively in their endeavours to cheat one another more thoroughly.

The most arrant dishonesty presides over these transactions ; for artifice, deceit, fraud, and any kind of conduct are allowed for the purpose of increasing one's profit, and no one is very angry, for commercial dishonesty is considered lawful. In Equatorial Africa there is as yet no idea of a development of business based upon credit, or of credit founded upon the confidence which honesty inspires.

The man of the woods is greedy for gain and a great cheat. He quibbles and haggles and contends desperately for his advantage, and has fathomed the art of fraud and sophistication. He understands how to put stones in his balls of rubber to increase their weight. His haggling is never-ending, and to get a higher price he will return to the attack twenty different times under various subterfuges. He will carry his bit of ivory or few balls of rubber from factory to factory, then rest awhile, only to return and begin his rounds again. Finally he makes up his mind ; he agrees to a price in time, and accepts payment in any kind of goods, but he audits the account with an air of suspicion to make sure that it is correct. This is not the end, however, for the goods which he has just received are to him merely representative of his ivory's value and not at all what he wants. So he sticks to the shop-counter, with the object of making the very best terms in exchanging what he has for what he covets, and starts afresh, making selections, discussing prices, changing his mind, declining what is offered him, and then accepting it—he is enough to wear out the patience of an angel.

The natural exuberance and cheerfulness of the men of the plains lends more good-nature and liveliness to their business dealings. I can still see one of my porters bargaining over the exchange of a piece of cloth for some cakes of manioc paste. The manioc merchant thought the waist-cloth too small, but the customer, who wanted his dinner, pleaded his cause to the best of his ability, and when all his arguments had given out spoke in something like the following words : “ You will look very handsome in my waist-cloth ; you will be proud to walk about in your village, and it is a garment that will last you many days. But what will become of your manioc ? I shall eat it, and down it will go : quick, quick ; then I shall step aside into the bushes, and p-r-r-r-t . . . there will be an end of it. . . . ”

I do not remember whether the merchant’s heart was touched ; but my porter certainly deserved all success for the high comedy of his diction and gestures, and for the fidelity of his scatological onomatopœias, which were intended to give a vivid picture of the ephemeral life and fatal end of the manioc, as comparèd with the lasting advantages of the bit of cloth.

## CHAPTER III

### THE VILLAGE AS A SENTIENT ENTITY

Now that I have taken the mechanism of my subject to pieces I must put it together again, restore its natural expression, and give it life and motion. If the reader wishes to have a true picture of its general aspect, he must not lose sight of the fact that in spite of the complexities which I have gradually annexed to the primitive couple, and in spite of the classifications and distinctions which I have been obliged to create therein for explanatory purposes, the organization of the village is still based on the type of the original family, of which it is, after all, simply an extension. It is not in any sense an aggregation of distinct entities, either simple or complex, but a fusion of them into a homogeneous whole, a common soul. It is not an association of persons who are free to resume their own individuality when they like ; it is itself one single entity, whose life is that of the whole community, and, so to speak, all of one piece with it. Like any fully developed animal organism, it has senses, perceptions, sensations, emotions, passions, and joys.

The village is an Argus which nothing escapes, for its vigilance is unceasing, and its eye, like a cat's, even when heavy with sleep, keeps a narrow slit of a peep-hole open to the outside world. Let us look at such a village. Man and beast alike have succumbed to the oppressive noontide heat, and even inanimate

Nature seems to sleep. The village square is deserted, the huts are silent, and one might think that some sudden scourge had exterminated the inhabitants. But a traveller comes walking across this lifeless solitude, and exclaims politely, "I am walking through!" Then from the huts which you thought empty, and from the dark recesses which you fancied death perhaps had struck, from the silence which you deemed breathless, through the shut doors and the mats stretched across them for protection against the hot sunlight, there issues a prolonged murmur, a strange, modulated "Hu!" a *sotto voce* chorus, in which all the vocal registers blend in a long, dull, chromatic *fusée*. The villagers who are the least drowsy invoke an indiscriminate wish for a pleasant journey upon the whole outside world, but do not show themselves. "Good-day, Ogula," they say; "good health go with you!"

The village has a keen sense of hearing. News clears the spaces of the bush with extraordinary rapidity and is diffused like a subtle breeze. It flies, one knows not how, across rivers, forests, and mountains, changing its shape at every stage until nothing is left of it but an almost unrecognizable outline. Three or four hundred miles are nothing to Iris, the harbinger of the Dark Continent, but though she starts out a goddess she ends a fish. Take no useless precautions to disguise your progress through a district, for it seems as though the ground had some marvellous resonance, which spreads an alarm ahead of you, and when you get to some strange village you find that you are already expected. The rumble of the great alarm-drums, cut in the trunks of trees, escorts your caravan from village to village, and their muffled blows, whose conventional rhythm is punctuated like some Morse code, rise in many an echo, now deep and heavy from the neighbouring copse, and again shrill and thin from far away on the horizon of the distant plains.

The village has a sense of smell like an animal. The semi-starvation which is its usual condition irritates its olfactory sensibility, and from afar it scents game, or a caravan of smoked meat that is passing by, or some carrion drifting down-stream.

Without too much exaggeration the village may be said to have a sense of touch, and, indeed, in the district over which it rules it is like a spider in the middle of its web. It would seem as though the vibration of some delicate and invisible network gave it immediate warning of everything that happens within the radius of its touch. When the alarm comes the small city explodes into extraordinary agitation, and feverish activity prevails. If it is a caravan with provisions, appetites are whetted, and the Natives fling themselves upon the passing windfall with stomachs which are never satisfied. If some imprudent wild animal falls into the monster's power it is disembowelled and cut up without delay, and a loathsome scene of carnage begins. I have seen almost nude people plunge delightedly into the stinking entrails of some pachyderm which had been two or three days dead, slash off immense quarters of its flesh with little knives, tear out its intestines, scrape its bones, and emerge covered with bloody fragments and saturated with the wild scent peculiar to savage beasts.

But the village has its hours of peace and calm too, when it displays a picture of patriarchal customs worthy to inspire a bucolic poet or the painter of some allegorical fresco. All its characters are like idle folk, with slow, harmonious gestures. You will see one man, as he takes his siesta in the shade of a tree, sitting on the ground, and supporting his back by a forked stick, while he scratches himself and drives off the flies with a little brush, yawning sleepily the while. A woman kneading manioc is kneeling in front of a

wooden plate, her two fists doubled over the round pestle, her loins arched, and the sweat pouring off her forehead and chest as her long breasts sway to the motion of her body. At her side, clad only in the amulets which protect his frail existence, her little one drags himself naked through the dust. His nose is running, his stomach is huge, his navel prominent ; his big hairless head is not yet very firm upon his shoulders, and his large, black, troubled eyes wander inquisitively out into the world, flooded with sunshine. A small starveling dog, like a gaunt, fierce skeleton, roams about in search of any scraps that may have escaped the voracity of humankind ; and a sorry hen picks up a wretched livelihood, venturing with a boldness uncommon in her kind even under the millstone to filch thence a few scraps of meal. In single file three women pass on their way to the fountain. Their shaven pates look quite tiny above their thick gorgets of red copper ; but, as though to compensate for this, their bodies are inordinately long, thanks to the double square of bark fastened by a very loose fibre at the lower part of their loins. The stiff waist-cloth, which swings from right to left and back again, gives them an ungainly, awkward gait, while the clashing of their big anklets and the clank of their leg ornaments of brass wire accompany the dull thud of their naked feet upon the ground. Each balances a water-jar on her head, and holds one hand at the nape of her neck and the other to her side, as their bodies arch, and they come walking along as stiff and straight as jointed dolls.

The village cultivates the plastic arts, expressing them through the medium of the dance, in the different forms of the war-dance, the love-dance, and the dance of pleasure. The Negro has a very marked inclination for dancing, and studies it with great attention and perseverance. We can all remember some bend in a

path where we have surprised a woman coming from the fountain with water-jar on head, and we can recall her sudden stop and apparent reflection as she laid her burden upon the ground and then tried some new posture or difficult step, all alone in the forest. Even the wild tribes of the interior have carried the art of dancing to a great degree of perfection, and it is certainly the most picturesque of their customs. I shall later have occasion to recur to the psychological causes and social significance of the Negro dance, and then the reader will understand why—inasmuch as it is a means of exciting a collective impulse—it has nothing to do with our mechanical ballroom dance, but stands in a much closer relation to the highest form of ballet. I do not include the commonplace caperings of the Lower Congo, but, to make amends for them, the investigator will find a truly captivating sight in the passionate pyrrhics of the Pawans, in the quadrilles, minuets, four-steps, and six-steps of the Middle Ubangi tribes, in the languorous, lascivious rhythms of the Upper Ogowe, and in the cotillons, fancy-dress balls, and masquerades of the Mpongwes.<sup>1</sup>

The Fan *meluma* is a frenzy of motion and an outburst of martial rage, expressed by mad contortions and bestial howls. The ground trembles under the quick vibration of the dancers' feet. Their naked bodies, scarcely covered with short skirts of leaves, and daubed with white, red, and black, the grimacing faces, the eyes starting from their sockets, the agitated limbs, the throats rattling out guttural sounds, the reddish, wavering gleam of the torches, the shadows inordinately magnified, which twist and turn like weary marionettes on the grass near by, the shock of crude lights and shadows—all remind one of a devilish evocation in the sinister gleams of some inferno. Gradually the movements degenerate into frenzy, agitation

<sup>1</sup> It goes without saying that the above terms are merely analogical.



is inflamed to madness, and the dancers, intoxicated by the din and their own dizziness, become capable of the most horrid excesses and the worst acts of ferocity.

Elsewhere the dance is a caress ; a song proceeds by short chromatic phrases, in the minor mode, and with drooping inflections, while the ballet-dancers advance and retreat in turn, sometimes down the front, and again in oblique lines. Their faces and arms take no part in the action, and the mask simply shows a desire not to make any mistake. Their elbows are held against their sides, while their hands beat time. The whole expression and action is in the pelvic region and the legs. The waist undulates, the hips move rapidly or twist slowly, the knees flex in quick time, while the feet touch the ground with the end of the great toe, alternately in front, behind, or at the side. There is no marked gesticulation and no vivacity ; all the motions are supple, cadenced, harmonious, encircling, languorous, and delicate. The coryphées adapt the figures of the dance to the amorous and plaintive melody, and move back and forth in the gleam of the dying torches like black Bacchantes.

The village has its attacks of rage. Beware, O Traveller, if you see no women or children about, and if the armed warriors have a crafty look, restrained speech, and a vigilant air ; for this calm and scarcely quivering surface is like the pressure on a boiler just a moment before it explodes, and well may you dread it. If you have not a strong party be wary. Matters may be smoothed over if you have an unconcerned air, are unarmed, and are dignified and yet unprovocative in bearing. Above all, do not show fear, for fear has made many a victim and has caused many a disaster in Africa. You must have that composure which is equally removed from cowardice and rashness. Many a time has a witticism or a broad jest at the proper moment

changed the storm into a burst of laughter and disarmed those who were ready to strike, but a single imprudent movement may produce an explosion. It is like pulling a trigger. The assagais and knives fly, and chance directs their aim. Then the villagers are off in a body unless they are in overwhelmingly superior numbers, for the Negro is not fond of fighting at close quarters. He jumps back when he strikes, with a sort of fear of what may follow, like a child lighting a cracker. His anger is all show and noise, and is supported only by the example of his fellows and by mutual encouragement.

The village has its fairy scenes. Primitive man is fond of listening to Nature at such delicious moments, when she seems as though she were inviting him to reverie, when mystery and illusion obtrude themselves upon the wandering mind and seem more reasonable than reason itself. And, after all, what matters it? What will it advantage him to tear aside the veil of illusion? Will his convictions be any the more settled? And how does his certitude, which is based upon the immediate evidence of his senses, differ in itself from that of civilized man, which rests upon very complex processes of interpretation? Try to undeceive him, and he will retort that you are blind not to see what he sees so well ; for appearances and a priori impressions force themselves upon him as powerful evidence, just as they strain our positivism, if we forget our training for an instant, close our mind to the pre-digested ideas which we have absorbed with our mothers' milk, and cease to heed the more or less conventional systems which represent the scientific creed of the hour. We call this simple science of pre-historic man a ridiculous illusion in the name of our science, which is so changing and so unstable that men of future millenniums will no doubt in turn stigmatize it as a ridiculous illusion too.

Near the rumble of a triple cataract in the Bosyeba country I once saw a village transformed into a magic scene by the ambiguous transparencies of a moonlit night. It was a fantastic sight, a plunge into dream-land, an infusion of the unreal. There were no stars in the sky, and only the moon showed her pale, moist face, floating and indistinct, as though seen through a blurred pane of glass. The spaces were filled with the nebulous, milky mists of a chaos without top or bottom, wherein opalescent vapours, alabaster filaments, and silken trails moved hither and yon. One might have fancied it a percolation of phosphorescent ether through an atmosphere of milk and water, which combined and then separated all the possible shades of whiteness, from the glitter of silver spangles to the dead white of stucco ; from the modest rainbow hues of mother-of-pearl to the cold pallor of chalk ; bluish white, roseate white, mauve white, yellowish white, glaucous white ; warm tones and cold ; all the pallor and suavity and every transition in the diminishing scale of white. In the midst of this milky ocean up rose and then vanished away changing forms of mutable colour and shape. Now they were flakes of opal or snowy filaments, and again transparent, feathery down or liquid pearls. At such a sight there suddenly leaps to one's mind the idea of an intense extra-human life, and of beings almost incorporeal, of an animated substance so subtle and light that it floats in space, so unstable that it dissolves incessantly, and incessantly re-combines in innumerable metamorphoses. One is witnessing a phase—the imaginative or intuitive phase—of the genesis of beliefs which are the oldest and most deep-rooted possessed by man. Is not this spiral mist the diaphanous robe of a fairy swimming in the ether? Is not this halo, with the soft bloom of a pastel, just the gleam of her cheek, spied for a moment? Is not this fog-born drop, which darts a sparkle only to be quenched anew—is it not the twinkling eye of some

waggish sylph? And this luminous opacity, whence darkness is banished, this space, which seems solid, but is yet mutable, impalpable, almost incorporeal—is not this the vast breath of the world, the protoplasm which engenders these spirits whose activities are the determining factors of Nature's mysterious phenomena? Is it not the crowd of them, palpitating, close together, like the ripple of the waters among the pandanus-trees on the river bank, which lends ordinary sounds their downy softness, and is heard in a shrill overtone of innumerable little noises, rustlings, delicate brushings, frail tinklings of bells and of crystals? Oh, enchanted tropic nights, inspiring to marvellous visions, your magic is too high for our practical minds; our disillusioned realism has bereft your luminous mists of their dances of beneficent and ill-omened dæmons. The cold knowledge of physical laws has not compensated my emotions and my heart for the loss of the human—I had almost said fraternal—element in them. Suddenly a harsh voice is lifted up in the silence of the sleeping village. It is the coarse, guttural voice of a man who is bound to this terraqueous sphere by his dull corporeality; but it is of you that he sings, fleet spirits, spirits of Night's fluorescence, spirits of earth and wind and water. His barbarous harp-strings reverberate to the tinkling sound of your silvery voices, which, from the slowly condensing clouds, fall drop by drop upon the river's vast, sonorous boom and the crashing din of the cataract. And lo! your brothers, nestling in the holes of the rocks and in the giddy swirls of the stream, take mischievous delight in sending the man's wild song back to him. The black bard, heedless of the mockery, tirelessly hurls into the faint whiteness of the night his monotonous rhapsody, which has but two notes, or three; which hastens on, then stops short, then drags the same syllable long, oh, so long! and, spreading afar among the tall grasses of the plains or the lofty leafage of the forests, soars on high to delight

the spirits of the Upper Kingdom, drives back into their holes of darkness and dismay the malevolent vampires and sinister ghosts who persecute poor mortals, or else wings its flight to declare unto all the winds the glory of the ancestors and their splendour.

## CHAPTER IV

# THE VILLAGE AS AN ORGANIZED ENTITY

I AM now approaching the most arduous portion of my task. It is arduous for many reasons, some of which are objective and belong to the question which we are investigating, while others are subjective and depend upon prejudices of our own.

### A. LEGISLATION.

The natural laws which presided over their consolidation into social bodies are entirely beyond the comprehension of the Negroes. These laws are not expressed in any oral form, and far less are they written, so that the easy task of a compiler is denied me, and I must needs formulate them myself in accordance with an observation of the facts. Such a reconstruction is very apt to give rise to errors, although the implied code of Negro civilization is so exceedingly embryonic—perhaps because of this very fact.

On the other hand, I find that I am, at the outset, faced by the interlocutory question whether legislation is anterior or posterior to events. Has it the power to cause things to happen, or does it merely sanction them after they have happened? As I hope that the sequel will prove, an observation of primitive man undoubtedly shows that law which is not expressed, but which is unconsciously felt and complied with, precedes

formulated law, and that if the latter is to be obeyed at all there must be some reason why the vast majority of the citizens should obey it. In other words, law is not forced upon man simply because it is law, but because it answers to a profound and widespread national want. Law is not an artificial and arbitrary product, but is—or ought to be—the spontaneous efflorescence of extremely different factors, which are never understood by the very body which is their scene of action.

Great nations which have been governed only by laws that were absurd in theory, and by defective codes, have been prosperous and distinguished for their illustrious deeds ; but it was because the entire body politic accepted such laws and codes for what they were, instinctively supplied their deficiencies, and rectified them in practice. General common sense, on the one hand, and, on the other, that individual and social training which is more valuable than codes, filled every gap and subordinated their systems to the infinite number of shadings in special cases. Too many laws are bad laws. Their number increases as public opinion grows less cohesive and obsequious, and at the same time they themselves become less efficacious, because they take on an artificial character and cease to echo the general sentiment of obedience to rule and mutual responsibility, which is in its turn impaired by the disintegration of society. It is a common prejudice to think that a law is able to change conditions, for in reality the most it can do is to interrupt the normal progress of morals, if it is not adapted to the circumstances of place, time, and people—or rather, if it is not their natural product. The domestic history of States is chiefly, if not entirely, made up of the mishaps arising from a lack of agreement between laws and facts. Let us note, incidentally, that progress calls for a certain amount of discord and a constant effort to adapt the present law to the future which is to come.

This prejudice that law is omnipotent in itself has been read into the social organizations of primitive tribes when under the observation of travellers and officials who were bent on endowing them with rules of administration as preconceived by themselves. For there are Europeans who are unable to conceive that human society, not to speak of many animal communities, can exist without having an organization which conforms to an abstract principle previously laid down and to logical deductions.

Primitive society accordingly has latent legislation, which is felt but not expressed, which is enacted by habit, if I may say so, and which is an instinctive product, partly of selfish individual interests and partly of these interests' mutual adjustment. But, since such a latent law does exist, why have not these primitive men been impelled to fetch it out of its inarticulate state and express it in plain language? Why have they not yet had their Moses or their Confucius? <sup>1</sup> To begin with, the cause is undoubtedly to be found in the fact that the population of these districts is exceedingly scattered and very sparse, and the administration of such social groups as do exist is reduced to the most extreme simplicity by reason of their diminutive size. In the second place, if we make a minute division of the population which constitutes the mass of the African Negro tribes, we find that the individuals

<sup>1</sup> According to M. Dusselje, whom I have already quoted, it seems that the Bateke of the Alima had a law-giver a short time ago named Okuba, and that he left them laws concerning the economic development of the country, and, to a certain extent, the moral progress of the population. This Okuba was evidently a man of genius; but if his precepts were ever destined to be obeyed it would have been because they found an echo in the minds of a people who had reached that precise point in the course of its natural evolution where their observance was useful to it. Otherwise this legislation would have become a dead letter immediately upon its promulgation. It is a pity that the European invasion should have interrupted a movement which was interesting for more than one reason.



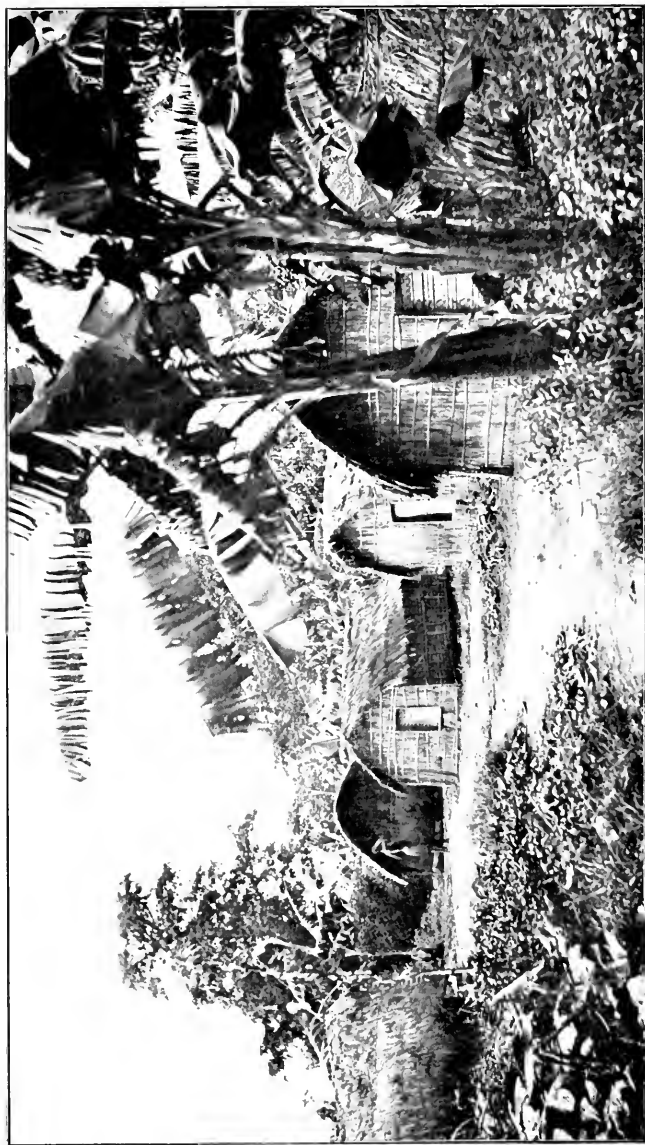


Plate XVI.

A BATEKE VILLAGE AT STANLEY POOL.



of every portion and group are identical with those of every other one, exactly as very small parts of a physical medium, whose composition is a continuous function of its three dimensions, are found to possess a homogeneous structure throughout their tiny extent. Almost all Negroes are cast in the same mould, are normally adapted and geared to one another, and, so to speak, are superposable throughout their whole extent. The ideas and concepts of all the inhabitants of each one of these miniature cities are as much alike as the copies of a book which are all printed with the same letters. Consequently the political operations of the village, as a social cell, are entirely automatic, and have the precision and perfect co-ordination inherent in all instinctive actions.

Now, let us grant that after a lengthy period of time the population increases in number, and that the tribes who are at present separated coalesce into nations of increasing consequence, whose inhabited centres grow more important, and whose relations with foreign tribes become more frequent and active. From this time on there is no homogeneity in these agglomerations, which are no longer very small ; the citizens gear with one another, as we may say, to a very limited extent, and not from natural inclination, but because they are swayed by conscious selfishness, in which all share, and which impels them to strengthen and enlarge their associations. Henceforth some explicit and tangible reminder must be continually recalling to each individual the necessity of sharing the responsibilities of the community. Instinct and an unconscious impulse were at first sufficient to unite the citizens ; but from now on they will need conscious reflection, and individuals who are refractory will have to be compelled to do their duty. Thus matters remain until this half-voluntary training of the people has in its turn become mechanical. Progress ensues under the most favourable conditions when these successive

stages vary so slowly and with such continuity that the citizens grow accustomed to them insensibly. Unfortunately, however, man is not a mathematical term, but a sentient, thinking, passionate, and aspiring creature, whose passions and aspirations are echoed in the minds of his fellows. They constitute the greatness of nations which are homogeneous by virtue of their geographical situation and history, while they create or aggravate discord among nations which are rendered heterogeneous by their geographical situation or by the slow or violent invasions to which they have been subjected. Nations like the latter are doomed to instability, for they are constantly attempting unduly violent changes; and these occasion revolutions, whose disturbances take a very long time to quiet, and whose sole effect is usually the postponement of the phase of automatic operation which I have just mentioned.

The latter part of this investigation will show the first steps of this evolutionary process.

## B. COMMUNISM.

The village, as an extension of the family, compels its citizens to strict communism, to dependence upon one another, and to a fusion which reduces every one to the same level and submerges personality and originality. The villagers are not free to enjoy themselves apart, to indulge in solitary reverie, to suffer or to love alone, for they live close to one another, dependent upon one another, and in the interest of one another, possessing no initiative which is not immediately stifled by the greed or folly of the crowd, and knowing no secret which is not instantly discovered by a curiosity for ever on the alert. This state of surveillance, perpetual criticism, and lack of personal dignity would be hateful to our European independence, for no man belongs to himself at any moment of the day or night. The cooking-pot, the pipe, the

wife, the waist-cloth, filth and disease all pass back and forth, from hand to hand. It must not be expected that any individual will improve himself or look to his own cultivation, for the employment of one's physical and intellectual powers demands quiet and seclusion, and the development of one's talents cannot endure the importunities of the crowd, or the obstacles created by its stupidity, jealousy, and greed. Hence the pinions of potential talents are broken before they appear, by the impossibility of self-realization, and almost as soon as they have taken wing they fall back into the formless void of barbarism. Therefore, in the beginning of society there are natural distinctions, but no social distinctions, no aristocracy.

The architectural type of the village and the manner in which it is arranged are the faithful reflection of this political communism. The long continuous hut is a phalanstery where each individual is at home with everybody and everybody is at home with him. The partitions made of leaves are like thin curtains, through which one can almost look, and which permit the sounds of the most softly whispered confidences, the faintest sighs, and the most modest demonstrations of affection to circulate from one end of the winding edifice to the other.

The subdivision of the continuous hut and its dispersion into separate huts is the symbol of a considerable change in social conditions, for it shows that a strong proportion of individualism is moderating the communism of the beginning, and one feels that the idea of independence is dawning. Man acquires a home, can arrange his hut to suit himself, can sleep in it when he feels the need, can leave those who bore him, and may indulge in solitary reverie when he has a melancholy mind. Dimly he begins to see that as citizen and private individual there is a certain duality in what one can as yet hardly call his civil status. His quality of citizen implies certain duties, while as

a private man he has certain rights, and is no longer a slave to the community, beyond what is necessary. He must devote a portion of his life to the city, so that he may look to the welfare of the community ; for in protecting it against external foes the security of each of its members is guaranteed by the security of all, and by defending it against internal enemies what we call justice is attained.

Of course, this small step in advance is not yet perfection, for the line of demarcation between the citizen and the private individual in these embryonic societies is as yet very uncertain. Liberty is still confined to the four walls of a straw hut, as is individual or domestic personality, for the tyranny of the crowd lies in wait at the door and in the village square. But although the confinement and inconvenience of the home compel its proprietor to perform a certain number of the actions of his private life in the open air, still, personal inequalities can now be developed, and through them social inequalities are brought about ; and, last of all, we have aristocracies, which are to extricate the original raw material from its barren uniformity and give it a brain.

### C. AUTHORITY.

We must now apply ourselves to study man's innate inequalities as they develop under the form of social inequalities, for this will lead us to the concept of authority.<sup>1</sup>

As I have often observed during the course of this investigation, the source of the principle which generates all human associations, from the bi-sexual couple to its loftiest metamorphoses, lies in the instinct of conservation which is roused by man's struggle against natural forces, animals, and other men. What I have

<sup>1</sup> I have spoken previously (p. 133) of the physiological origin, as I may call it, of paternal authority.

said of the union of man and woman, of domestic economy, of the advantages of a community of labour, and of specialization according to the talents and aptitudes of individuals, has shown us what motives lead strangers to join the primitive domestic nucleus, first as artificial members and then as clients. They are all seeking the protection of a strong support for their persons and property, and this is the same as saying that Negro associations are founded on man's inequality. Even among tribes who profess anarchy,<sup>1</sup> who proclaim universal equality, and have no expression for the word "chief," we see that the weak court the strong, and that the populace submits to the influence of powerful, eloquent, and skilful leaders—of those who, in a word, are born with the mysterious attribute of natural ascendancy. Authority, in what manner and under what conditions we shall see later, results inevitably from this inequality, this weakness of some and strength of others. The many Utopias which have been invented in this connection, and which may all be reduced to a few varieties, start with the idea of men who are all identical, all without defects or passions, all equally strong and equally intelligent. Given such perfect material, there is no doubt that perfect systems could be evolved, and indeed that all systems would be perfect, no matter what they were; but in practical working it is just these innate inequalities and the consequent inability of the majority to think independently, to create and to find their own way, which form the stumbling-block. The strong minority and the weak majority—taking the words "strong" and "weak" in a very broad sense—make a fair exchange, the strong man contributing his predominance to the account and the weak man his numerical support, which fact establishes the supremacy of intelligence.

This is the plain and simple form of the initial law, as our observation of savage man shows it to us. We

<sup>1</sup> Fan, Bateke of the Alima.

must not expect it to be more definite, for this is quite sufficient, and though it is unwritten every one is conscious of it and obedient to it.

When I discussed the subject of property, I explained how individual possessions—taking this word in its broadest sense and including all possessions, human and otherwise—were reciprocally guaranteed by an implied consent, and by the opposition of ever-armed and vigilant interests. In this case, again, there is no formulated law, whose necessity is nowhere felt, for each party concerned is protected against the eventual oppression of the other party by the latter's own interests. Each finds it advantageous not to push its claim to the extreme, under pain of causing either a strike or a lock-out respectively, as we say nowadays, and of thereby bringing about its own ruin ; for the small, embryonic social structure which we call the Negro city is kept from falling by the alternate play of contrary strains and by the equilibrium which the majority and minority interests maintain.

It is interesting to note the difference which at once appears between the anarchist tribes and those who have even some slight form of organization, although this difference is merely a seeming one. Among the former tribes authority is occasional and temporary, and is exercised by some leader or popular orator, in a given case. For instance, Edvugh wins the majority of votes in some difficult palaver, and the whole assembly momentarily obeys this ephemeral chief ; but to-morrow Nzok will have succeeded Edvugh as a leader of public opinion. Here, then, the combatants in the struggle between the majority and minority interests are incessantly changing and incessantly being renewed, and from these constant changes in the administration there result domestic quarrels, disputes, instability in making plans and carrying them out, and public dishonesty. These are inevitable consequences. But no great danger to the public weal ensues, because



the social body involved is very small, and because, as I have previously remarked, its members are morally and intellectually almost identical. Under such circumstances no great upheavals of public opinion can take place, nor will the majority change to any great extent, and after many trials this palpably homogeneous little community finds some political leader who embodies its momentary passions for the time of their brief duration.

From the institution of temporary authorities among the anarchist tribes we are led by imperceptible degrees to the tribes who have a political organization in which two opposition parties are quite permanently established. We find that one of these parties is a single man, who is at first the real father of the original family, and then the supposititious father of the enlarged family, while the other party is a collectivity which is subject to this father. That an associate member of the enlarged family should submit himself to this sort of paternal government means that he ascribes to the head of the family talents which are innate or acquired by experience and skill, as well as tact, in the administration of public business—in a word, he admits that the chief is one degree above himself. The principle of authority originates in this real superiority and in its recognition by the social body. In this epitomized history, which the Negro tribes of Equatorial Africa are unfolding beneath our eyes, we thus see the concept of authority, as personified in the father of the family, emerge from the primitive chaos of society ; then we see it pass beyond the father of the family in the anarchist tribes, establish and embody itself in an artificial father or elder among those who have reached a more advanced stage, until at last it extends beyond the village, groups several villages under a single administration, and finally becomes a hierarchical government. It is important to observe at once that the form of authority in the Black Man's country,

although it originates in the father of the family, is not a patriarchate, as many authors have considered it, and as it may perhaps have existed outside of Africa. The name of "father" which is given to the chief, as it is to every aged man and every person of consideration, does not of itself make these embryonic states of society exclusively domestic in character. It is true that they are derived from the family, but they soon break away from it, because, as I have said, the bond between the associate members and the primitive support to which they cling is not made up of affective sentiments, but of selfish interests only.

Let us remember this first essential point, that authority appears from the beginning as the resultant of the consents of those who are destined to be its subjects, and who, in fact, surrender themselves to it. It is plain to be seen—for the matter appears in its simplest form—that authority derives its existence from this consent, is not practicable without it, and owes it all its own strength. Accordingly, authority is nothing in itself—no abstract principle—but a delegation of the wishes of a collectivity to one of its members or to a group of them, for the purpose of co-ordination and systematization, or, as we may say, of administration.

It is important to observe that this liberty of consent is entirely comparative, for an individual places himself under the suzerainty of another only when existing circumstances make it a condition of his life or death, and the liberty of his mandate hence extends only to his choice of this other individual. The weakness and natural or accidental inferiority of the subject compel him to tolerate a master, but unless he is a slave he is almost always free to choose his lord according to his likings or the degree of his confidence in such a lord's power. Sometimes the chief becomes very friendly and complaisant, and points out the advantages of an alliance with him when he wishes to attract new

vassals. "Come along, Binga," he will say ; "build a hut in our village. What is your present chief but a poor wretch who is without power or influence? He has only three wives, while I have six. You need fear nothing if you are one of us, for we are strong ; and besides, we have plenty to eat, since we are on the trade route for meat and manioc." If a man has no resources of his own and feels his lack of natural gifts, he cannot but yield to such arguments.

Accordingly, it is neither his immediate chief nor the assembly of his chiefs, if several are superimposed above one another in formal rank, whom the citizen must hold responsible for his condition of inferiority, for he is the hopeless slave of an unrelenting tyrant, who is none other than himself, his own physical weakness, his dull mind, and the lack of proportion and balance in his faculties. It may also happen that his mind is too lofty or too original for its inferior social surroundings, but at any rate he is doomed to thralldom by his inadaptation to his environment, whether it takes the form of too much comparative greatness or insignificance. General calamities or private misfortunes may bring about an accidental loss of dignity, which affects the superior man like a natural inferiority, or which is added to the deficiencies of the inferior man. Under such circumstances servitude does not appear an evil in the least, but a vital necessity for the immense majority of men, among whom we grant that there is a lack of superiority, or at least of a harmonious balance of faculties. As I have said so often, when men are almost in a state of nature they differ very little from one another, and hence it is only in consequence of very slight and subordinate circumstances that Fate refuses them independence or supremacy. The necessity for them to put themselves under control becomes more pressing as civilization progresses, because cultivation becomes more intense and causes an unequal intellectual development. These differences are

accentuated as mankind advances. A true picture of this phenomenon is found in that law whereby drops of water which are close together on the edge of a precipice separate more and more as they fall and are soon diffused in mist. We see the same thing in social life, for the men who are at the top of humanity—not the playthings of the crowd's momentary infatuation, and the puppets of a day, but those individuals of real talent, who are sometimes undervalued by their contemporaries, but who are the true guides of human progress—grow rarer from year to year, while in their wake is strewn the innumerable rabble of those who are ever less suited to take part in the administration of a social organism which is increasing in complexity, and is like an enormous belly endowed with appetites as enormous as itself. Romantic historians show more sentimentality than good judgment in dramatizing the serfdom of the Middle Ages, for they judge those barbaric times as if they themselves had been obliged to live in them with their nerves, their ideas, and their tastes of the nineteenth century, all of which no doubt would have been horrible torture to them. In reality, however, the people of those days were like animals incapable of finding their own way, and needing the harsh discipline of the iron glove if they were to grow into their present condition.

Without going so far back into history, the witnesses of prehistoric ages whom we meet in modern Africa—among the Fans, for instance—show us this phenomenon of “stretching,” if I may so call it, whereby the rough mass of society becomes an ordered government, based upon filiation or upon intellectual and moral superiority, both of which systems vary in practical value at different periods.

Another consequence is that this sort of forced but synallagmatic contract, imposed by the natural play of mutual interests, invests each of the two parties with certain rights and obligations. These societies would

continue to exist calmly and peacefully in their own surroundings, just as we see them, if the two parties knew the just proportion between their rights and duties, and accomplished the latter strictly, while they scrupulously respected the former with all good faith, or, as I should say, with a perfect knowledge of their own best interests. In practice, however, no such thing happens, and, moreover, it is best that it should not ; for if these ideal conditions could be brought about their result would be an absolutely barren state of stable equilibrium, while in reality, by a natural inclination, the two parties tend instinctively and simultaneously to encroach upon one another and to defend their own positions obstinately. Hence results a state of unstable equilibrium, which keeps society in working order and in a continual state of productive activity.

Now let us recall once more that the individuals who make up the Negro populace differ very little from one another, after the merciless elimination of the unfit. This close approach to equality causes the equilibrium of which I have just spoken to be very unstable, and hence political authority is weak ; for the one who holds office is the living symbol of the confused velleities of the community rather than a strong executive possessing means of securing obedience. Many persons who trust to a deceptive title are under a delusion as to the power of the Negro chief—at least, among the fetish-worshipping tribes. For reasons which I am about to set forth at length, such a petty magistrate is far from being a potentate. He has not a shadow of power over any one except his own slaves, and this he has only because they are isolated and lack the aid of alliances, so that they are often, but by no means always, unable to resist the master's tyranny. But over the free citizens the chief's authority is valid only in as far as it is the mouthpiece of the majority interests, lacking which character it falls to the ground. The

rare attempts at arbitration are weak and inefficacious, and fail as soon as expressed in words. I have often seen the French Government encounter a pitiful *non possumus* in its endeavours to make the chiefs exercise an authority which was opposed to their normal laws, and have witnessed the ludicrous distraction of these princes of comic opera when caught between the threats of administrative thunderbolts and the proud ataraxia of their subjects, who had an air of saying: "Make your own arrangements with the white men; we owe you nothing, and you have no means of compelling us."

The preceding shows that primitive society is centred about a man who, in addition to the power which he possesses, unites in himself the superior advantages of wealth and clients, as well as intelligence and experience. The chief must deserve the confidence of the village by his material, physical, and moral prestige, and must justify it by the manner in which he represents the community and regulates public activities. He must be a good and faithful executive, and accountable for the commission entrusted to him; but he is without power and without prerogatives, and hence obeys rather than commands. He is but a droll shadow, after all, and his magisterial office merely flatters his vanity a little.

The fact that an individual is delegated to represent a collectivity is a new example of the specialization of aptitudes and the division of labour, in addition to those which I have enumerated before, and is one which deserves a separate place, because it is both important and interesting. Its subject-matter is man himself, who is conscious and active, who is indeed so far from being passive that he is endowed with reactivity, and will not allow himself to be utilized without his consent. Hence the profession of chief is particularly delicate when compared with other occupations, for it cannot

be practised upon what does not share in its activities. Its methods are not guided by positive, definite, and unchangeable rules, as, even in our old civilized world, the most profound systems of philosophy have never found a formula for it, but indeed despair of ever discovering one at all. The art of government is made up of variable and changing operations, of expedients, shifts and artifices, and of caution alternating with rashness. Talent is not always necessary to it, but it must have conformity, and the shepherd must be suited to his flock, for the greatest sage is as much out of his element in a dull, ordinary age as the fool in an heroic period. In a practical government empiricism is everything, and theory counts for nothing ; but a close correspondence in character, morals, and outward appearance between subordinates and chief makes for mutual confidence, for subjects will submit to be governed in the harshest manner if the sovereign resembles them. Thus a gesture of Sultan Zemio is a death-sentence, but the victim whom he indicates does not dream of showing surprise or protest, for he would do the same were he in the other's place. Despotism is a necessity in that Nyamnyam kingdom, and the gentler authority which we introduced has not been appreciated by the people of the country, nor is there the least probability of its deposing the present system.

But to come back to our Bantus, the normal progress of whose social evolution has not been disturbed by any foreign interference. Here the man in authority derives his only sanction from the majority who approve of his words. This fact is enough to show the instability which prevails in village government, for the continuity of its projects depends exclusively upon an individual whose will may at any time be opposed by some freak of the community. Here, again, we fortunately find an important factor which we have already noted. The social groups which form the object of our study are

very small, and usually very limited in their preoccupations ; their mental make-up is alike, and the races of which they are composed differ very little, or rather take on differences by degrees, owing to the cross-breeding which they undergo along the boundaries of their areas of habitat. All these circumstances taken together amount to a sort of tradition which is fixed enough to guarantee a certain continuity in the progress of public business, and therefore the political sanction does not thrust itself forward as frequently as in thickly populated and heterogeneous States, whose activities are great and their wants excessive.

Among the Fans the permanence and uniformity of public opinion are guaranteed by the most patriarchal feeling which exists anywhere in Tropical Africa. Over these people, who are so interesting in many respects, brood the shades of their ancestors, enforcing upon their several tribes traditions which have been orally transmitted from generation to generation, and imparting to them a feeling of reverence for noble deeds and a sort of discipline which applies both to society and to the individual.<sup>1</sup> It is certainly to this ancient tradi-

<sup>1</sup> " Like the Roman, the Fan has his *gens* and his *familia*, and though the Fan villages are designated by the name of the familia (*etun'a*) at the periphery of their area of habitation, they are none the less a branch of the tribe (*ayon*). Almost the same phenomenon as history records of the Romans during the fourth and fifth centuries is taking place among these people now. The family name is coming more and more into use, while the name of the *gens* is forgotten or is growing obsolete. But, although the Fan families which are called and which call themselves by the name of the *etun'a* perhaps do not need the powerful support of the tribe for their wars and general interests, under the new conditions of their lives, this does not prevent them from knowing their lineage. A young man of twenty can connect himself through a series of ten generations with the father of the *etun'a*, the son of such and such a tribe. And the old man, who is a melancholy guardian of traditions which are passing away, goes back thirty or thirty-five generations to some remote ancestor, meanwhile enumerating the families which have sprung from the parent tree, and are dispersed almost everywhere on the north coast, on the Como, Ogowe, and Fernan-Vaz, or who have



tion and to his domestic religion that the Pawan owes the best part of his moral force and his untiring tenacity, for each of his social groups acquires a cohesiveness from ancestor-worship which its lack of political organization precludes ; and the fertility of this nation, its slow triumph over its neighbours, its insuperable expansion, and its rough originality would show what prodigious power a common faith gives to human associations, if the proof were not superfluous. The demonstration of this fact acquires new force from the necessarily limited scale of the picture which I am presenting. Ancestor-worship causes its followers to lose sight of the race, which is too vast and remote for their ken, and to concentrate upon their one branch of the ancestral tree, because it is closer to them and more present to their memory, though more limited in extent. Ancestor-worship inculcates the two opposing sentiments of passionate loves and implacable hatreds, which are corollaries of one another. Cohesion there is among dispersed nuclei, but the whole mass is in a state of disunion, discord, and internecine war.

In the course of this long account of the origin and development of authority among the African Negroes the reader will not have failed to remark that their government, which is in other respects so weak and spiritless, partakes of no religious character. Its *raison d'être*, which is entirely based upon physical superiority and material and economic interests, does not lend itself to any mystical interpretation ; but here I need do no more than mention this essential point, remained in the interior, on the Kam, the Ntem or the Mvun."—R. P. Martrou, *Notes sur la langue fang et ses dialectes*.

We must not be too much deceived by this number of thirty or thirty-five generations given by the Fan old men. Even allowing the African Blacks four generations per century instead of the three which are generally counted for the white race, this filiation would make the Pawan tradition go back eight or nine hundred years, which seems to me hardly admissible.

which will be better understood when I discuss the subject of religion.

The chief of the village is not usually distinguished from the other villagers by any external sign, such as age, costume, or any characteristic insignia.

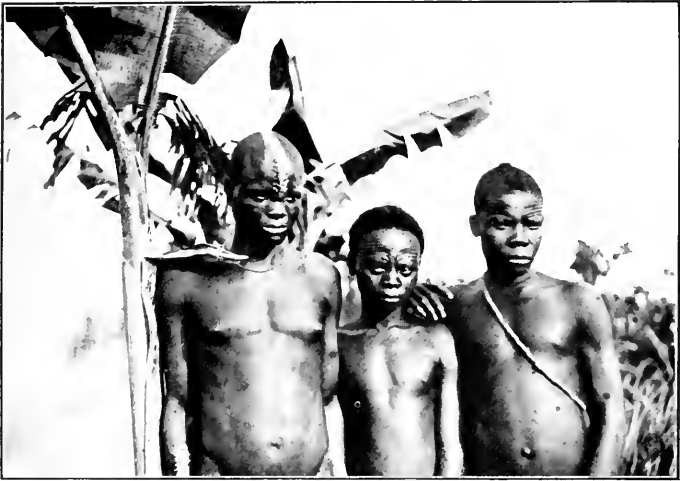
The first attribute of his authority which appears is the staff, not, as one might fancy, a big, knotted stick, which would be capable of wounding or killing, but a curved rod, twisted, forked, and weak, as one might say, upon which the owner cannot even support his steps. It is indeed the symbol of Negro control, for it is feeble, supple, and not very useful.

As authority gains more extensive sway, its representative is distinguished from the common herd by new attributes. The first to make its appearance is a special headdress, which is a sort of mitre, shaped like a muff and made of the skin of some small animal, such as a civet, genet, or monkey, and which is placed upon the head by its rear end, so that the paws fall symmetrically upon the temples and the nape of the neck. Then comes an elephant's tail, retaining the hair and ornamented at the lower ends by rings of copper and metal wire, rolled spirally; this implement combines the functions of sceptre and fly-whisk. After this we have a mantle of red cloth<sup>1</sup>; next a flat copper collar, whose circumference is covered with indentations and its surface with the chasings which are distinctive of its owner's rank in the social hierarchy<sup>2</sup>; then a bracelet, composed of two or three interlaced metals; finally, a leopard-skin; and last of all a lion-skin draping the litter upon which the great chief is carried as though on a buckler. Among the tribes who have long been in contact with Europeans,<sup>3</sup> persons in authority are fond of sporting huge felt hats whose lower part is set in a red fez, and here,

<sup>1</sup> Atyo or Bateke of Stanley Pool.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> The tribes of the Lower Congo.



BANGALA AND BAPOTO TYPES.



*Plate XVI.*

BANGALA AND BAPOTO TYPES.

To face page 284.



too, a big red cotton umbrella has become a symbol of high office.

Generally speaking, authority is exclusively vested in the stern sex ; but there are, nevertheless, some instances of women who have performed the highest duties of office. I myself have known three cases, two in the Lower and Middle Congo and one on the Sue. I must acknowledge that they acquitted themselves no worse than their brothers of a sex by contrast with which, speaking generally, their own could scarcely be called fair.

No particular homage is paid to the chiefs. The Atyo are the only tribe I know among whom the vassal makes public profession of his respect. This he does by kneeling and extending his hands horizontally in front of his suzerain, who accepts the homage by laying his hands flat upon those of his vassal.

The chief's ordinary functions may readily be understood from the details which I have given concerning the origin of authority. The chief, as I have said, is the living symbol of the village, whose public activities he co-ordinates and directs. He is lavish of his verbal advice, which is the fruit of his experience, or, perhaps, his ambition. He leads discussions on matters of private and public interest, represents the community in its business with the outside world, and is the spokesman who arranges contracts or settles disputes with neighbouring villages or with strangers. If he is adroit or a little crafty, he will not hesitate at sharp practice, for his privileged position will serve his private interests, and in advancing the business of all he will not forget his own. His prestige and his reputation are brought into play, for the triumph of his eloquence and the success of his diplomacy may attract new adherents to him or turn a trade route towards his village, and in consequence the products

manufactured by his wives will be disposed of more easily and he will be enabled to increase his harem and his *ergastulum*. In this case his vanity is satisfied, for he is on the road to power, and you will see him excited, talkative, and, with many gesticulations, showing his amiability and craft in turn. Boastfulness, boldness, and the faculty of seizing opportunities are the weapons by which he defends his popularity. If one would but believe him, it is he who has done everything and who is capable of accomplishing any prodigy. If some one gets up to contradict him, he swiftly calls vehement protestations to his aid, interrupting them with a sort of hiccough of scorn and those clicks of the tongue which are peculiar to the Negro and which rouse the anger of the audience against the questioner ; or he may cover the unfortunate man with ridicule and turn the gibes of the spectators against him by some broad or indecent remark. The simpletons drink in the great man's words, murmuring their approval from time to time, and tapping their lips with the ends of their fingers when their amazement is at its height. Finally, the hero of the day retires with grotesque dignity, wearing his filthy fur cap and waving his elephant's-tail whisk.

When a village is fairly important the chief has an understudy. The Negro cannot think all alone, for he has no power of concentration and personal thought. He must therefore have a confidant, who may be a wife, his eldest son, a relative, or very often a slave. This individual knows his master's secrets and the hiding-places where he conceals his wealth, takes his place when the great man is really absent, and acts as his substitute when the chief makes use of a feigned absence in order to elude an embarrassing question or a dangerous responsibility which might be entailed by his granting personal audience to some stranger. This confidant is often very faithful, since it is to his interest

to be so. He takes his master's part, speaks in his name when he is not present, recalls the tribe to the observance of compacts or of any advice which the chief may have given before his departure, and upon the latter's return gives account of his stewardship and reports interesting occurrences. In a word, he has the triple functions of lieutenant, counsellor, and minister.

#### D. ASSEMBLIES, DEBATES, AND SUITS AT LAW.

The village, as a miniature city, has a *pnux* like Athens of old, in the form of its *bandza*, *abayn*, or guardhouse, among those tribes who possess this sort of building, while among those who do not it is a simple shed, open to every wind, or even the shade of a large tree.

The deliberative assembly, to which Europeans have given the general name of *palaver*,<sup>1</sup> constitutes the entire political life of the members of Negro society.

There is no need of issuing a call to the palaver, for the loquacious on the one hand, and the inquisitive on the other, convene with admirable spontaneity and promptitude. The Native is in his real element ; for his greatest pleasure consists in meddling with matters that do not concern him, in random discussions, in laughter and shouting, in an alternate assumption of rapture and indignation, and in a play of tragedy and comedy. He takes one man's part or another's as his caprice or his interest dictates, applauds and vilifies different persons with the most disgusting insincerity, and intersperses serious discussions with obscene exclamations. Women are, luckily, excluded from this

<sup>1</sup> This word is wrongly given the masculine gender in French by many persons. The languages of Southern Europe and the Provençal dialect, from which it was borrowed, use it in the feminine. Originally it was employed in its literal meaning of debate ; then it was incorrectly given the meanings of dispute, quarrel, and war.

function because of their inferior position, as are also slaves and persons who have not yet arrived at puberty ; so that these orgies of gossip and dispute are the exclusive prerogatives of adult free males.

Everything furnishes a pretext for a palaver : the slightest incidents of public and private life, disputes, altercations, thefts, murders, news, plans, the erection of huts, and the founding or removal of villages ; but the main argument, the favourite subject, and the one which is so often discussed as almost to cause the total eclipse of all the rest, is the eternal feminine. We should not be astonished at this, however, for, as our great fabulist says, "Love, thou wast the ruin of Troy !" But in Africa, as I am almost tempted to believe was the case in ancient Ilion, the motive is less poetic. It is all a matter of money. Do not forget that woman is a form of wealth, that adultery is poaching, rape a theft, and that not to pay the price of a wife is to declare oneself a bankrupt. This is the whole thing in a nutshell. Woman is the pivot upon which the entire political economy of Negro society turns, and hence she is also the main subject of dispute. Mercury presides over these African courts ; but Cupid scarcely puts the end of his nose into them. I have, however, gone into so much detail already about the origin of these processes that I may be excused from recurring to them.

Palavers generally proceed without any method or order. There is no president to direct the discussions, to be impartial in giving the different orators permission to speak, or to impose silence upon those who interrupt ; for every one is president, and hence arise frequent conflicts and abuse, though I must add to their praise that the members never come to blows.

The usual custom is to begin a discourse by the words, "I say that . . ." to which the audience replies

' Bobangi : "Na ko-loba . . ." ; Fan : "Me zo na . . ." ; Mvili : "Min' ya ku-tuba . . ." ; Mpongwe : "Mi buya ne. . . ."



by a sonorous mark of approbation, though with closed lips, "Hun!" as they raise their chins. By this the speaker knows that he will have a hearing, and he proceeds. Among certain tribes the oratorical style is excessively tiring to the European taste. The speeches consist of a series of very short propositions, delivered in a peremptory but monotonous tone, which the entire audience scans in unison by the approving "Hun!" It is like a number of blows with an axe, cutting the speech as delivered into fairly equal fragments of about twenty words each, and producing the quaintest effect imaginable.

The classic type of the palaver is found among the Fans. In the other Congo tribes it is more or less the same, though usually without set forms and solemnity. The Pawan assembly, however, has as much gravity and dignity as a session of the old States-General. The warriors sit or recline around the interior of the abayn, some of them paying undivided attention, while others busy their fingers in some small task like sewing, hairdressing, or joinery, and listen while the pipe circulates from mouth to mouth, and a few logs burn slowly in the middle of the hut. The native Demosthenes walks to the middle of the free space, a slender rod, the sign of his temporary dignity, held between two fingers, and begins to speak. Even if one knows no word of this difficult language, the mere modulations of his delivery give one a very clear idea of the trend of his argument. "Me zo na . . ." one feels the insinuating exordium, his statement of the subject, and the division which he makes of it into several distinct parts. He broaches the first point, discusses it in detail, and refutes the allegations of the opposite party. His voice swells, and is in turn persuasive, passionate, biting, and sarcastic. *Ad hominem* arguments and questions to the audience vary the discourse at the proper moment. "Look you, Obaga," the speaker will say, "you are

a just man, and do you think that such conduct is right? And you, Ekomie, who have many wives, what would you think if some one should carry off one of your consorts like that?" Suitable gestures accompany the words, and the examination of the first portion ends by a summing up in the satirical style. A moment's pause follows amid the silence of all; a slender column of smoke goes eddying up from the hearth, no sound is heard save a knife lightly scratching the handle of an assagai, or a smacking of lips as some one sucks at a pipe. The orator strides about collecting his thoughts, and then begins again, "Me zo na . . ." and the second point of his argument is developed like the first. The same thing goes on for a very long time, involving all the speaker's pride in his art. Treasures of eloquence are squandered for some Helen, who is valued at two kegs of powder, some guns, and perhaps ten pieces of cloth; but, finally, the speech of counsel ends in a majestic peroration, which is punctuated by imperious gestures and dignified by an emphatic voice and passionate inflections.

This description would be incomplete without its peculiar colouring. We must imagine a tall, pale-brown, old man, tanned, wrinkled, and dirty, whose body is barely covered with foul rags, whose woolly hair is crowned by a fur cap, and whose grey beard is plaited into two or three braids; or else we must picture a young warrior, painted red and white, adorned with barbaric necklaces and bracelets, and wearing a tuft of parrot feathers as a headdress. We must give the speech its barbarous accent, which is both nasal and guttural and which is peculiar to the dialect, must emphasize it by strange onomatopœias, by shrill cries and hollow sounds, must break it by silences like musical rests, in which the speaker, with swelling neck, tense muscles, wide-open mouth, and perspiring body, supplies the deficiency of words by an imitation in dumb show of the scenes and sentiments that he wishes

to describe. And we ought to see the excitement of the assembly when a general discussion takes place after the last words of the peroration. One might fancy that the Eumenides were hurling themselves upon some unfortunate Orestes. Faces are distorted, eyes are bloodshot, hoarse sounds and savage rattlings issue from writhing mouths. Fiery Ngama and stout-hearted Nzokh bound into the arena, and one would think that they were surely about to tear one another to pieces and eat one another up. We need have no fear of that, however, but may imitate the perfect calmness of the spectators, who are not in the least disturbed, and who phlegmatically continue to take a siesta, make a baldrick, or drink a calabash of *meyokh*,<sup>1</sup> as the case may be. They know that the whole affair is gesticulation and show, and when all the participants have howled as much as they like and made a great ado silence falls all at once, like the sudden fall of a curtain. More speakers follow in due succession, and a large number of similar sessions always end in some definite conclusion. To tell the truth, the Natives are in no hurry to settle matters very quickly, for their pleasure would be gone if these interesting palavers had too prompt a solution.

If one asks whether these discussions have any clear and precise result, the answer must be that such a result is due to impulse, but not to reason, and that it often takes some reckless form, which may be only a burst of laughter among the light-hearted tribes, but may be murder among those whose nature is fierce.

#### E. WAR.

Disagreements between villages almost always start from some very simple incident, but their course is tortuous, gratuitously confused, complicated with events extraneous to the matter in question, and they terminate

<sup>1</sup> Brandy.

in a skein so tangled that at last every one is in the wrong and no one is in the right, extreme measures are taken, hatred is excited, and reconciliation becomes impossible. Some of these grudges last for several generations, and amount to vendettas whose history is made up of thefts, abductions, rapes, and homicides. In the beginning they may have been due to the fact that certain parents neglected to compensate their ex-son-in-law for the price which he had paid for their daughter who died prematurely, or that some young wife fled with her lover to escape a decrepit and impotent Bartholo, or that some Georges Dandin in real life was not compensated for the infidelities of one of his better halves.

If the injured party would content himself with the enforcement of his rights and a demand for restitution or compensation by means which were at least legitimate, even if not legal, all would be well. But there are no legal means, or even legitimate ones in a place where the most elementary morality is non-existent, because it has no penal sanctions. The plaintiff has no resource but threats, then vengeance and the satisfaction of his pride in lieu of material compensation.

Now a theory which prevails among these tribes, as I believe it does among all primitive peoples, is that responsibility for an action extends to all members of the same family or the same village and to all relatives and affiliated members. Accordingly, near some thicket a good man who is walking quietly along a path without thought of ill, or some woman who is returning from a plantation with her basket of manioc on her head, may receive a mortal blow, which is meant to punish the misconduct of some Madame Bovary of an allied village. It is an everyday story, and alternate reprisals by each side thenceforward protract the series of events. Villages which are related to the principals find themselves implicated in the quarrel in their turn, because of the above-mentioned

theory, which makes them share the responsibility for crimes committed by their allies ; and the temple of Janus is thereupon opened so wide that one cannot see how it is ever to close its doors again.

It seems to me that it will be well to illustrate these general remarks by a story which is abbreviated from official documents. It happened in the Basundi district :—

A chief named Manima was married to a woman who was a dependent of Chief Vuvu, and who died about a year after her marriage. Manima then demanded of Vuvu the price which he had paid for her, and this Vuvu naturally refused to pay. Hence resulted a war between the two chiefs, during which a woman of the village of Ngoma-Salu, who was wife to a man of Vuvu's village, was killed. Ngoma-Salu claimed an indemnity for the death of this woman from Manima, who refused it. Then Ngoma-Salu seized the persons of two women from the village of Madiki, the chief of Manima's land. Madiki immediately went to the village of Ngoma-Salu to demand explanations. Ngoma-Salu replied that he had captured the two women because he, Madiki, was the chief of Manima's land, and that as such it was his duty to make Manima pay the indemnity due for the murder of a woman of his village during a dispute in which he had no share. Madiki promptly refused, and demanded his two women. He also claimed compensation for abuse of authority and damage caused. Ngoma-Salu in his turn rejected these claims. Madiki left his two women in the hands of Ngoma-Salu, went to the European commandant of the neighbouring station and asked for militiamen to get his two hostages back by force. Accompanied by four militiamen,<sup>1</sup> Chief Madiki went to the village Chityunga, which was a dependency of Ngoma-Salu, and under cover of night abducted four women belonging to Ngoma-Salu, who, learning of the rape, cried out to Madiki to come back and discuss matters with him. Madiki refusing, Ngoma-Salu got into a rage and fired two chance shots in the direction of Madiki. He missed his aim, but killed one of his own women and wounded a militiaman. In consequence of this unhappy occurrence, Ngoma-Salu retreated into the jungle and became the terror of the countryside. The matter finally reverted entirely to the French administration, and thus ceases to interest us. It is important for us to remember the incredible complication of incidents and actions setting all logic and common sense at defiance, and the resulting vendettas.

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<sup>1</sup> I cannot see that this was a proper case for administrative interference.

The wars of these districts consist entirely of such isolated acts of aggression, and, indeed, it seems as though this were the only sort of war known to primitive mankind in any climate. They have no battles in regular array and no attacks in the open, for the most sanguinary hostilities are confined to assassinating a few persons and abducting one or two women in the course of several years. The Negro does not usually attack in broad daylight, but, choosing the moment just before sunrise, lies in wait for his enemy in the thickets which border the ford of some stream, and hence he discharges his arrow, assagai, or gunshot point blank at his victim, while the latter is still in the confusion of crossing, and then flees immediately through the underbrush.

All kinds of courage and the lack of it are met with in the tribes of Equatorial Africa from absolute cowardice to a comparative degree of martial valour ; but even the latter is not the intrepidity which makes a man await his enemy unflinchingly in the open field, or rush to the assault of a strongly fortified position. The Negro is not capable of single combat or hand-to-hand fighting, where both sides are equally well armed. His only art consists in killing by surprise, when he thinks that there is no danger of being hit back. He is fond of attacking the weak for the sake of his own greater safety, and women often bear the brunt of masculine quarrels.

## CHAPTER V

### THE VILLAGE AS A MORAL ENTITY

#### A. THE ORIGIN OF BELIEF.

THE sphere of religion includes everything for which man has no theoretical or practical explanation. Speaking abstractly, religion is the science of the unknown, while, practically speaking, it is the volitional fellowship of individuals whose object is the realization of one and the same ideal.

Man has scratched the surface of the unknown in the course of the ages, but no matter how far his examination has gone there will always be a residuum, whose extent and nature are infinite. This is the unknowable, which we may define as everything in the universe that cannot be measured by man's standards, and that depends, not upon sensation or ratiocination but upon intuition alone.

In the beginning an intelligent man counts the entire universe unknown, with the sole exception of his external and internal unreasoning sensations, or, as we may express it in another way, he sees two worlds face to face: his own personality and Nature. His ideas of physical phenomena are bounded on the one hand by his personal strength and activity, and on the other by the obstacles which the external world puts in the way of this strength and activity. Since he has no standard of comparison but himself, he is naturally led to liken the strength and activity of ex-

ternal objects to his own organic functions, and as a matter of fact we have never ceased to do the same ; for the abstract and concrete unities—taking this term in a very broad sense—which underlie our modern science are born of us, of our powers, and of our bodily dimensions ; and our physical and mechanical concepts do no more than carry over into Nature's physical system the modalities of our bodily strength and activities. Beyond this, however, primitive man feels a motive ego, or will, within himself, and as every effort which he makes upon the masses which surround him entails reactions on their part he asks himself if they, like himself, have not wills which are mischievous and annoying, inimical to mankind, and often harmful, and which may be supposed by an inversion of the argument to belong to the motive egos of beings which are similar to man but made of a different substance.

Primitive man is not slow to discover that a multitude of dissimilar objects act against him with a single will ; as, for instance, fire is not produced by one kind of wood only, nor even by wood alone, but appears in many different substances. Accordingly, analogy leads him to the idea that there must be wills belonging to beings which, if they are not immaterial, are at least not perceptible to human sense. They are supposed by him to preside over the phenomena of the universe, and to be provided with human faculties, passions, and desires ; and although they do not partake of man's corporeal nature, still they are thought of as acting upon visible matter, over which they possess more power than man, because they understand how to employ such formidable elements as fire, wind, and lightning.

Thus we see that the savage gives unknown phenomena an anthropomorphic interpretation as far as their manner of working is concerned, but a superhuman, and necessarily superhuman interpretation, in reference to the nature of the beings which cause them.



This is the rational origin of primitive man's beliefs, whose intuitive origin we have already seen.<sup>1</sup>

## B. RELIGION.

### 1. *Dogma.*

The Negro's beliefs rest upon special cases only, and are not the product of generalization or classification ; for, in his opinion, the universe consists of beings which live side by side and act independently of one another, just as Negroes do in Africa. All is variety on the earth's great ball, for the native cosmogony is a confused mass of scattered notions, which are added to at the pleasure of any man whose theology proves inadequate for the interpretation of some inexplicable event. This is characteristic of polytheism, for the unity of the world entails the concept of one supreme God.

(a) *Man.*—Negro beliefs are founded upon a vague form of spiritualism in which man is supposed to consist of two substances, the physical body and a double which endows it with life, and is like the *ka* of the ancient Egyptians and the *perisprit* of modern spiritualists. To this double man owes his life and organic functions, and death means the separation of the two.

The Native has no definite ideas about the nature of these doubles. They are not souls, nor yet "pure spirits." Some persons say that they have seen them disembodied and have been beaten by them, while others compare them to the shadow of a body in the sunlight and give them the same name. It is true that such a shadow does not exist at night, and one is impelled to ask where it goes. Perhaps this similarity of name is merely a symbol or comparison, or it may be only a verbal confusion, such as is often found in these dialects, where one word frequently has

<sup>1</sup> P. 263.

very different senses. The Latin *umbra* has this double meaning too, and the curious comparison occurs to one immediately ; but the ancients distinctly acknowledged a third principle—the soul—which differed from the *phantom*, and which still animated the latter after death in the inferno ; while this third principle is not recognized by the Negro, save in an implied form.

The material or semi-material nature of the Negro's double is again asserted by the persistence of its physical wants after death. It is hungry, eats, and has sensual appetites ; it needs wives, and if a man has been a great chief during life his double requires servants ; so that some tribes secure it from any privations of the sort by sending an escort of wives and slaves with it into the next world—the poor creatures being strangled at the grave for the purpose.

It is probable that the double may be, partly at any rate, absorbed by a living person, for the Fān eats a portion of his enemy slain in battle, and while it is not sure that this practice implies more than the idea of offering a bloody insult to the manes of the dead man and to his entire tribe, no doubt the victor believes that he is likewise assimilating some part of the soul and martial virtues of the man whom he has conquered.

It is thought that the double may reappear on the earth after its separation from the body, for the Natives have a universal and unquestioned belief in ghosts, whose action upon the living is generally supposed to be noxious. Ghosts populate the dread mystery of the darkness, taking a malicious delight in tormenting the former companions of their sublunary existence, causing nightmares and pulling the feet of sleeping men, or lying heavy on their chests, while they may also await belated travellers at some turn in the path, thrash them thoroughly, and sometimes carry them off into the realm of shadows.

But in spite of such diversions as these, we are

given to understand that existence after death is devoid of pleasure ; for death inspires the living Negro with the greatest terror, as indeed it does all his brothers among mankind. His belief in spirits is not at all reassuring or comforting, and de cease promises him a dark future with no outcome whatever. He imagines that the double has a tame and rather unhappy lot, and that it wanders about in a mysterious fashion, though whether for a time or eternity no one knows. The Negro is right to fear death and to be so cautious in exposing his life that he is almost cowardly, while he clings to the positive pleasures which are sparingly furnished him during his lifetime. Duels and suicides are unknown in these lands.

(b) *The World*.—In addition to man the world is thought to be populated by superhuman beings, or spirits, which direct such natural phenomena as rain, storms, thunder, and wind, and watch over rivers as they rise and flow. I can add nothing as to the nature or activities of these beings beyond what I have already said when I discussed the origin of beliefs. The Negro endows them, in a vague way, with faculties and functions which are similar to those of man, but which serve superior intellects and are gifted with matchless power. These spirits are formidable to man and cause him many inconveniences and perils, nor can he make direct resistance to them, for his only defence lies in the occasional use of charms and incantations. These extra and superhuman worlds have none but evil beings, for goodness is excluded from the Negro's universe.

(c) *The Deity*.—Above this pandemonium of spirits and ghosts soars a supreme being,<sup>1</sup> a dim, motionless, apathetic god, to whom the Natives ascribe very little

<sup>1</sup> His name is, according to different dialects : Nzame, Nzamo (Nzaon), Nzambi, Ndjakomba, Anyambie, Nzapa, Gumba, etc. Almost all these words are derived from the same root.

power, who is never invoked, and who has no spécial cult. He has an abode, but it is not known where, nor is there any exact knowledge of his essential character, save that he is invisible and has some little cold, platonic pity for mankind. He has desires and passions, however, which are quite human, and is married to a wife who has no other attribute than her sex and whose sole function is to keep her divine spouse from being bored in his majestic isolation. It is the general opinion that the creation of the world and of man is due to him, and a few legends, which are doubtless apocryphal, and which, moreover, vary in different tribes, are related of him.

It is a remarkable fact that White Men entered into the legends of certain peoples before Europeans made their appearance, and that such beings, who were unknown at the time, were thought to be of a superior and almost divine nature, and were awaited by some tribes in the form of a sort of Messiah.

(d) *Morality*.—Morality has no place in the religion of the African Negro ; for his ideas of good and evil are purely subjective and confined to good and evil in a material sense. The only person who really condemns a crime is its victim ; while cool, or even bantering, remarks greet an injury to one's neighbour. Thus they often say : "Benga has cut Zatene with a knife. Is this right? Not at all." The interrogative form, followed immediately by a reply, is frequently employed, their condemnation being directed much less to the action *per se* than to the idea that the speaker himself might have been the victim.

In everything that happens the African of the Tropics feels as though evil alone existed in the world, and as though good were merely the accidental absence of evil ; for everything is hostile to man. Not only is the competition for a livelihood between man and his fellows pitiless, but Nature prostrates him with heat,

benumbs him with cold, harasses him with mosquitoes, flies, and ants, floods his plantations or dries them up, and hurls upon him her tempests and the deluges of her tornadoes. And when he has the luck to acquire some pleasure, is it not because he has been able to baffle his competitor and frustrate her stratagems? Is it not because he has succeeded in being temporarily forgotten by the malevolent spirits of earth, air, and water, or because his spells have been strong enough to counteract their fatal influence?

But how, indeed, can the Negro introduce a particle of ideality or an atom of goodness and hope into his world of strife and anguish? His conception of the moral and material universe must needs be very pessimistic ; for his religion is negative, lacking in power to console, and voicing the despair of wretched primitive men, who are helpless against the overwhelming forces of Nature, of which they perish, not knowing why ; for they are but feeble reeds and scarcely capable of thought. And even after death man's roving double has no more repose, even in annihilation !

It necessarily follows from these dismal notions that man does not expect sanction, reward, or punishment, present or to come, for what he does, and that it is enough to escape the consequences of his misdeeds here below.

## 2. *Worship.*

(a) *Its Character.*—If by the word “worship” we mean observances and ceremonies implying homage and veneration towards one or more beings superior to man, there is no worship in Negro religion. No doubt their deities or spirits are deaf ; for no prayers are addressed to them.

There are neither idols nor images nor any other thing which has any claim to represent either the supreme god or inferior deities. There are no conse-

crated objects, for, as we shall see later, the coarse statues which are found almost everywhere are used in a way which is entirely different from worship as I have just defined it.

The Negro seeks intercourse with the Great Beyond only that he may ward off the misfortunes which it inflicts upon him, and the operations which he goes through are more in the nature of a remedy against a disease than like rites intended to appease some higher power or to excite its compassion. When the Negro wishes to use a European term to express the different operations which have this end in view, he generally employs the word "medicine," whose exclusively therapeutic meaning he understands. This confusion of terms shows that he ascribes illness and calamities of all sorts to similar causes.

We have seen that evil alone exists, that good is simply the absence of evil, and that evil is the work of beings which, if not superhuman, are at least extra-human, and which act by occult means. Hence, in order to rid oneself of a misfortune or to prevent its approach, it is sufficient to experiment until one finds the operation, formula, action, or material which will drive away the noxious thing or counteract its influence. This rude and barbaric empiricism is the embryo of science ; for empiricism ushers in all the sciences and accompanies them every step of the way. It gathers religion, medicine, and therapeutics into a shapeless mass at the beginning of human society ; or, rather, it groups everything under the head of religion, taken in the sense of my previous definition, as the science of the unknown and unknowable.

(b) *The Nganga*.—In Black Man's Africa every one is free to practise religious observances on his own account or on the account of others ; but if there ever was a gnosis whose vast extent and obscurity required peculiar talents and special experience, it is certainly

that of the occult. Not every one has the born gifts or the authority which are necessary for the penetration of these mysterious arcana, and, indeed, the mastery of this sovereign science must be the object of a special profession. Accordingly, certain wise men devote themselves particularly to these difficult questions and attempt to make other people believe that they understand something about them. Under the names of *Ngang*, *Nganga*, and *Mganga*, by which they are usually designated throughout Bantu Africa, their popular celebrity and influence are considerable.

Europeans usually translate the word "Nganga" by "fetish-doctor" or "sorcerer"; but these terms do not adequately convey the extremely comprehensive meaning of the word, which comprises the notion of wise man, priest, magician, judge, and doctor. The Nganga's sphere includes all mundane events which have hidden causes and exert an unknown influence upon mankind. It comprehends the secret forces of the material world, as well as everything bordering upon the psychic and psychological realms. I think it is only among the Fans that each "wise man" comprises all branches of the science in his own person; while in other districts each magician has his speciality, and one is a rainmaker, another a physician, another finds criminals, and still another manufactures amulets. Each village averages one Nganga, and when the local man happens not to be expert for a given case those who need his services run on to the next village in quest of the specialist they require.

Ngangas may be of either sex; but by far the most of them are men, although the female minority are quite as much feared.

It is very difficult to gain an exact idea of the part which the Nganga plays in Negro society. There is no doubt that he is a charlatan and impudently hoaxes his compatriots; for there is no counting the anecdotes

which reveal the most brazen fraud on his part. Africans of the higher tribes, who have a fair amount of intelligence, unhesitatingly resort to these apothecaries, even though they may be of a despised race. I knew a Senegalese, for instance, who had a pain in his side, due to some sort of intercostal neuralgia, and who called a quack from the next village. The Nganga went through a lot of hocus-pocus, and then made a superficial incision in the man's lumbar region, whence he pretended laboriously to extract some foreign body, and finally flourished a small antelope horn triumphantly. The patient felt relief, and as this was the main point with him, he did not regret the large amount which he was obliged to pay this prince of science.

Sleight of hand, magical passes, an air of pedantry or grotesque compunction, an apparatus of rags and roughly carved images, a strange medley of marks traced upon the face and body, a crown of feathers perched upon the head, noisy instruments which are shaken like castanets, sistrums or crotala, the preconceived idea which the populace entertains as to the adept's knowledge of strange things, the belief that he has the power of letting loose the most dire misfortunes by a mere gesture or by a simple glance, his supposed knowledge of herbs and of animals, his frequent disappearance into some secret retreat where he is supposed to devote himself to magic arts and intercourse with supernatural powers are the distinguishing marks of the sorcerer in all ages, and are what endow the Nganga with authority and fame and so bright a halo that even failure itself cannot dim its gilding. In the eyes of the common people the Ngangas partake of the mystery and terror of the witchcraft to which they devote themselves, and that they are not always the strongest in their contests with the spirits who preside over the phenomena of Nature is not surprising ; but it is their business to seek some new artifice by





*Plate XVII.*

YAKOMA TYPES.

(From photographs by M. V. Liotard, Gouverneur General Honoraire des Colonies.)



which they may conquer the hidden enemy. I remember one day when I was in the midst of a great plain that a tornado suddenly rose above the horizon. It was my good luck to have a sorcerer whose speciality was rain travelling in my caravan, and he at once prepared to drive away the impending deluge. I must be just enough to acknowledge that he left nothing undone in order to get the better of it, but stamped his feet and made impressive gestures and mesmeric passes. Finally he filled his mouth with water and squirted the liquid against the threatening cloud. But the rain came in spite of all, and seldom have I been so thoroughly drenched in the whole course of my life in Africa. I made up for it by laughing at the unfortunate practitioner, who, however, deigned no reply, but walked away from me with an air of wounded dignity, while my men seemed scandalized at my lack of faith and disrespectful mirth.

If you tell a Negro very seriously that you are incredulous about the practices of his occult science, he will shake his head and look at you with an indescribable expression of compassion, while he claps his hands and says, "White Men know nothing about these things, for they concern Negroes only."

Are the Ngangas mere charlatans, or have they some little real faith? I think that they must be divided into amateurs and professionals, and I believe that the former are unquestionably sincere, for they perform their incantations earnestly and trustingly, and, simple and faithful souls that they are, do not fail to draw stripes upon their arms, around their eyes, and on their temples every morning, before leaving their huts, for fear of the evil spirits.

There is no doubt that professionals have the same basis of belief in the occult as amateurs, but in their case familiarity has bred contempt, and they are spoilt by the frank credulity of their clientèle and by the excessive profits which they derive from their sacred

office ; for the incurable folly of the vulgar herd has for centuries been the richest of goldmines. Then, too, if the magician really believes in his incantations, he is proud to have his true science always in the right. What sincere believer will not be tempted to lend a helping hand to an experiment, as a matter of course and in all honesty? This does not harm the prestige of the profession ; indeed, the contrary is rather the case.

It is almost impossible for us, as Europeans, to discern whether there is any basis or tradition of a school or products of experience and observation—in short, any single atom of real science in all this jumble of magical practices. When the Negro is questioned he gives evidence of the most profound ignorance as to the physical, chemical, and medicinal properties of the material world, while his knowledge of anatomy and physiology is *nil*. Strictly speaking, I admit that the aim and meaning of our curiosity and the point to which it is directed may be out of harmony with such concepts as the Negroes actually possess, and I admit that we undoubtedly ought to pursue the same methods as they do, in so far as they have a method, so that we may assimilate the spirit and nature of this science of theirs ; but we cannot count upon this because of the mental difference and even incompatibility between the two races. We can speak their languages fairly well, can talk to them about everyday matters, and can give and take information concerning one another's views in what is, so to speak, their external phase ; but the basis and inner sense of these matters we do not understand—indeed, we misunderstand them. From this point of view the Negro is perhaps wiser than we, when he answers our questions by saying that we are incapable of understanding his ideas. In fact, we have never been able to get anything satisfactory out of him ; but, in my opinion, his reticence in regard to these subjects is not

feigned. He says nothing because he knows nothing, and, moreover, with very rare exceptions, which I concede out of politeness, I suspect that a fetish-doctor who means to be sincere practises his art in a haphazard, groping fashion, either obeying certain equivocal precepts which he has inherited from his predecessors or inventing formulas of his own.

I have been assured by the missionaries that some of these Ngangas, both male and female, are capable of producing psychical phenomena, and two or three cases of levitation and bilocation have been related to me. Unfortunately, such reports have come through at least two intermediaries before reaching me, and I think that the conditions under which the phenomena were observed left much to be desired. I know only one of these strange cases which is vouched for by an eye-witness. The case in point is that of a sorcerer who applied a red-hot iron plate to his leg without causing a burn. The witness then had the same plate laid, just as it was, upon his wooden walking-stick, which was burned to a coal. But no matter how much one may believe in the veracity of a person who relates such a tale, phenomena of this sort are so marvellous that one requires numerous proofs and experiments which should take place under conditions that put them beyond all criticism before they can be considered unquestionable.

(c) *Rites and Observances*.—Let us now see what procedures are employed in this intricate religion, as far as we can learn, and what are its rites, whose object, as I have said before, is to act upon invisible beings, so as either to drive them away or to pacify them.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In this connection I feel obliged to repeat that I have no claim to be saying anything new. The beliefs which I am briefly setting forth here in connection with Tropical Africa belong to all ages and to the whole of mankind; but it is interesting to observe the form under

If one asks how these procedures are supposed to act or how they really do act in certain cases, there is no answer at all, for the whole matter is under the sway of empiricism. The Ngangas are content to feel their way as they go along, trying drugs, magic, and amulets at random. If the result is favourable, it proves that the *medicine* is good ; if not, recourse is had to something else ; but it is essential to have naïve and implicit faith and not to lose courage.

*Amulets.*—Amulets are the great expedient against malign influences, as well as the Nganga's richest source of gain. They consist of simple substances or compounds, which are meant to preserve those who buy and wear them from the evils or witchcraft—the two are one—against which they have been manufactured.

An amulet must be considered as consisting of a container and a thing contained, both of which vary greatly. The container may be a little bag of cloth, a small pouch, a leaf, a snail-shell, an antelope-horn, the seed-vessel of some fruit, a seed without its nucleus, a bit of hollowed wood, a bone, or a statuette, in which latter the abdomen is usually roughly scooped out and forms a small cavity. The contents may be of any nature whatsoever, either leaves, pebbles, tobacco, metals, earth, or nasty messes. These substances are introduced into the cavity, shell, or horn as the case may be, the opening is closed either with clay, a bit of wood, resin, or sometimes a fragment of mirror, and the amulets are worn round the neck, at the belt, or on the arm, or else are fastened on the person by vegetable fibres or bands of cloth ; while other charms, according to the object sought, are arranged in a man's

which we meet them again among these survivals of primitive humanity. Such beliefs are so deeply rooted in manners and customs that they still persist in the middle of France, where there are peasants who worship fountains and appease the wrath of the saints by a mixture of Christian prayers and pagan incantations.

hut, near his bed, or in his shop or plantation. Their virtues are numerous and specific, as, for instance, one is a safeguard against wounds in battle, while others preserve one from smallpox, headache, and chest affections, protect one against the evil eye, and loosen the bonds of the captive. There are amulets to stop stomach-ache in children and to ensure a supply of the mother's milk ; there are those which drive away thieves, ward off ghosts, and so on. The efficacy of each magistrery corresponds to the skill of the Nganga who compounds it, and is also in proportion, as may be imagined, to the price paid for it. There is no mistaken avarice in the Black Man's mind when it is a question of exorcizing the malign influences which lie in wait for him at every turning in his path, in the thick darkness of night, or perhaps beneath the eyelid of some man or woman whom he jostles every day in the village. Should you want proofs, the Natives will tell you that if Mboko was the only one to escape drowning on the day when his canoe capsized in the river it was because he was wearing at his girdle the amulet which guards against perils on the water ; and that Lebwa, who escaped a crocodile, and Ikala, who has hunted the hippopotamus so long without an accident, owe their immunity to the same source. These instances are cited as so many unanswerable arguments when men chat together in the bandza, and of course the local magician is not the last to advertise his art in his own interests.

*Sorcery.*—The spells which are cast upon human beings seem to be directed especially against enemies, and are intended either to harm them or to keep them from injuring others. This is obviously real witchcraft ; but, to my great regret, I am not in a position to make my little contribution to this interesting chapter of black magic. I am comforted by the idea that it will be no loss to the reader, for I think that the

incantations, exorcisms, imprecations, and such other ceremonies as I am not familiar with follow no formal and definite rules, but are changed according to circumstances and the inspiration of the moment.

*Poisoning.*—There is no doubt that the Magian-Nganga uses his homicidal knowledge for his own benefit, and in a practical and direct fashion ; for he has no hesitation in employing poison from time to time in order to keep the stiffnecked and those of little faith in a salutary atmosphere of superstitious terror. Woe unto the bold man who is so disrespectful as to doubt the Nganga's skill ! One fine day the spirits of the Great Beyond will avenge their high priest and strike the impious wretch with sudden and mysterious death. Woe unto the rash man who has appropriated the wife or the goods of some one else ! His inexplicable disappearance will remove him from the affection of his fellows and will give the latter respect for virtue. Woe to the avaricious person who does not share his savings with his friends and relatives ! One little pinch of what Voisin called "succession powder" will send him to the realms of shadows and satisfy his heirs.

Natives often die without apparent cause and when no hidden motive of self-interest can be suspected. In such cases it is supposed that the only object of the supernatural powers is to make people remember that they are always present, even though invisible. The fear of spirits is the beginning of wisdom, and helps wonderfully to strengthen the sway of their authorized representatives in the world of men.

However this may be, poison plays a most important part in the policy of Negro States. There is a large number of individuals who disappear in this manner both up-country and on the coast, where the art of Brinvilliers has become an institution, and in the last



few years cases of poisoning have multiplied to an alarming extent between Libreville and Loango.

### C. THE PART PLAYED BY RELIGION IN PRIVATE LIFE.

In the course of the preceding chapters I have been obliged to investigate certain religious observances out of their turn because all these matters hold together : but in any case they all differ according to times and places ; for amulets, ceremonies, sacred dances, and other observances are employed at every period of life. At the birth of a child little bags filled with drugs are applied to preserve the health of the mother and the new-born babe, both of whom are daubed with camwood ; amulets are placed on the wrists and neck and at the girdle during early childhood as a protection against toothache, colic, and other discomforts of babyhood ; while ceremonies and ordeals occur at puberty and upon the occasion of circumcision, etc. The mass of details which an enumeration of all this nonsense would entail would be fatiguing and useless, and I shall accordingly mention only the two subjects of medicine and tabus, which are really interesting.

*Medicine.*—The Natives' notions about diseases are extremely confused, their pathology being divided into two distinct classes, according as the body or perisprit—those two elements of the human alloy—is involved.

The first class corresponds somewhat to our external pathology, and includes traumatic lesions, ulcerous sores, cutaneous diseases, tumours of all kinds, and asphyxia caused by submersion, also certain acute affections.

Negro therapeutics include wet and dry cupping, injections, and opening with the knife. It almost seems as though Native medicine had laid some high-handed bet on its ability to make skin diseases and sores as serious as possible ; for nothing is left undone to this end, and rancid oil, camwood, earth, dust, leaves

picked up in the rubbish-heap, and excessively tight bandages follow one another in uninterrupted succession. We may mention a few prescriptions, such as the following : soot applied to the skin cures bronchitis, two red stripes on the forehead procure an abundant supply of nourishment, and a black stripe on the epigastric region facilitates digestion.

Internal diseases, whose beginnings are insidious and whose progress is treacherous, belong to the double or perisprit ; for lesions are mysterious and their character is unknown, and the Native asks himself whence comes the secret blow that has struck at the hidden springs of life, which he considers a phantom dwelling within the body and quickening it. And he believes that just as a visible wound is caused by a knife in an enemy's hands, so may the vital principle be wounded by the spells of some wicked being who may either be in the flesh or disembodied. But he also believes that only the occult can harm the occult, and that one double may injure another double, just as one material body may hurt another. In his opinion there are people who voluntarily, or perhaps unconsciously, exert an injurious influence on those who surround them, and who slip away at night, flit through the bush, wander in the villages, and do many a wicked deed to defenceless sleepers by attacking their vitals and injuring or destroying the springs of their lives. I have never been able to find out with certainty whether it is the bodily form or only the double which is supposed to flit about the country in this manner, and, indeed, I believe that the Blacks do not know any more about it than I do myself. Certain cases are probably due to natural somnambulism ; but there are other instances in which the double admittedly frees itself from the shackles of the body for a few hours and flits about in all directions, while the gross envelope of flesh lies inert upon its mat.

The Negro argues that when an enemy strikes you

or one of your relatives, whether the blow be mortal or not, it is lawful to avenge the victim and to punish the author of the assault, if it is only to prevent him from doing fresh damage, and to give pause to others who might be tempted to act in the same way ; and he concludes from this that it is lawful to seek out and punish persons who cast spells which result in the illness and death of those who surround them. From this standpoint the matter comes within the province of the law, and is subject to such legal forms as I shall set forth later.

*The Tabu.*—This is one of the most curious institutions of these peoples, though it is not an invention of the African Negro, since many instances of it are found in ancient religions, especially in Semitic ones ; for, as we know, the Bible defines all cases in which the flesh of animals must not be eaten, or man and wife may not cohabit, etc., and the Book of Leviticus goes into detail in establishing the conditions and duration of such abstinence. These restrictions are quite as minute and tyrannical among the African tribes, but their meaning is much less clear than it is in the ancient religions, where every tabu reveals the legislator's anxiety to enforce morality and hygiene upon the people by investing them with a religious character. I have often asked myself about the source of many concepts in the Bantu races, and the above fact makes me feel inclined to think that they were originally due to some remote foreign impregnation. After the first contact these tribes probably deviated from the principles which they had inherited, and then distorted them in favour of those whom I may call the governing classes, who consist of the free male caste in general and the Ngangas in particular. At present this is the only form in which we find the institution of tabu universally spread throughout the whole of Tropical Africa ; and indeed a ruling caste

can guarantee its power in no better way than by imprisoning an ignorant populace in a close network of meddlesome commandments which compel them to watch their slightest actions under pain of death ; nor is there any rule more enslaving than that of the ever-present terror suffered by those who live in a state of profound faith.

As the nature of this work is such that the particular must give way to the general, I shall abstain from a detailed description of these strange rules. It would be useless in any case ; for they have no recognizable system nor any guiding principle, and, moreover, I think that it would be foolish to push an analysis of them too far, for when we leave their very general principles and apply them to individual cases we find nothing but caprice and chance ; and differences crop up in every small nation and tribe, and, I may say, in almost every village.

Any classifications which one might attempt to introduce have no real value and can serve no purpose save as a guide to the investigation ; so that they are more artificial than natural, and even the Negro does not see the differences in them.

We may accordingly group tabus under four divisions :—

1. Tabus which have to do with normal or pathological hygiene, and which imply the preservation of a healthy man from disease or the healing of a sick man. Such are the following : uncircumcized persons may not cohabit ; pregnant women must abstain from the flesh of certain animals and from tainted meat ; similar abstinence is required during certain diseases ; sexual connection is forbidden during the menstrual period, the latter part of pregnancy, and the period of lactation ; and it is forbidden to prepare food in a pot in which a bird has been cooked.

2. Purely ritual or religious tabus, as, for instance : persons who have not been initiated are forbidden to

look upon, touch, or invoke certain gods or amulets ; women may neither attend the funeral of a man nor certain male dances, nor, again, may men be present at certain women's dances or at accouchements ; a special tabu is declared at a person's birth, and carries with it total abstinence from some particular food, such as fowl, fish, manioc, or some other thing, and a similar prohibition is enforced regarding any animal whose name is borne by an individual.

3. Social tabus : the Mokoko of Mbe may not look upon the Congo without peril to his life. The case happened several years ago, when the Mokoko, who was a son of the man with whom M. de Brazza negotiated, was forcibly taken to Brazzaville by an administrator, and died a very few days afterwards. In this case one may wager that the Ngangas were unwilling to have their traditional tabu found lacking in effect.

4. Moral tabus, such as the prohibition of incestuous relations between near relatives.

The performance of various ceremonies and actions releases one from a tabu either temporarily or permanently, and any intentional or unintentional omission may be expiated by the same means, as in the Law of Moses.

The superficial sketch of these tabus which I have just given is sufficient for my purpose, and it will now be more interesting for us to see the social effect of these different observances and beliefs.

#### D. THE PART PLAYED BY RELIGION IN PUBLIC LIFE.

##### 1. *Religion as an Agent of Social Synergy.*

We must now consider things from a higher standpoint, abstract the gross, incongruous, and even ridiculous outside hull of the mythological system which I have just been describing, and, if possible, disentangle its philosophy. These beliefs, the race of gods, spirits,

and sorcerers who people the invisible world, and the barbaric farrago of childish fears which hold his dull mind captive obviously constitute the basis of the Negro's rudimentary morality and are the source of his social instinct, while they also furnish the initiate with an excellent tool for domination and exploitation. It is because primitive men all have the same equipment of profound beliefs that they follow one and the same path, render the most submissive obedience to their customs and the decrees of Fate, and grow homesick for their barbaric institutions when removed from them. I have already said that law is only salutary, valid, and efficacious in as far as a nation accepts it, and that it must be the expression upon certain definite matters of the consent of a majority of individuals who are united into a society which is swayed by a common impulse. Considered abstractly, law is far less the outgrowth of material and casual desires than the reflection of a state of mind which is common to a whole people, and of an ideal which a very small élite pursue consciously, and which the multitude unreasoningly believe, but which is shared by the entire social body.

These beliefs, which, from a philosophical scruple, I have taken care not to call superstitious, suffice to maintain and strengthen the African Negroes' intellectual and moral homogeneity, which was, moreover, inborn in them from the beginning. Of course there is reciprocity between a mentality and its resultant idea, and these Native beliefs may be as vague, shadowy, and chaotic as can be ; but it is sufficient to say that they offer this mankind-in-the-making that first individual training which is shared by practically every one, and which assures the stability and conservation of society, whether it has the sanction of the laws or not. If we take this point of view, and give the word "religion" a very broad meaning, we may add a new definition as complementary to those previously given,

and may call religion the soul of human agglomerations. The etymology of the word bears 'us out, for religion is the "bond" which holds the bundle securely together. Such beliefs as existed in the beginning have become purified in the course of time, and their accessory concepts have attained a loftier level, always retaining the notion of a first cause which is superior to man as their uniform basis ; and thus they remain as the essential factor of social synergy.

In discussing the action of religion upon Negro society, I believe that the one fact which explains the operations of the most secret energies in the social life of these races is the fundamental and serious nature of their faith. The impostures of the Ngangas, the amulets, and the observances, which are either disgusting or farcical, become of minor importance, although they are everyday matters. Undoubtedly the initiates practise a sort of simony and make their priestly power subservient to their personal pleasures ; but nevertheless the masses, who are subjected to a uniform discipline, constitute a powerful host, whose members cling close to one another, as they march irresistibly on towards a single, though invisible goal, their unknown destiny.

Our previous investigation into the nature of authority in these embryonic societies has shown us that it is an emanation of the social body ; but this is not enough, and we must look farther for its original source. We shall find it here, not outside of man, but within him, and unable to materialize in a delegate unless the private discipline of all members of the social body is alike and regulated in the same manner. Under these conditions the operations of authority are exactly like those molecular movements which destroy one another, and have no effect when they are scattered abroad, but which develop enormous power when they are impelled along parallel lines and in the same direction. No citizen is conscious

of his share in the psychological life of the community, for the subconscious bears all the burden, and must be prepared for its task gradually and in a suitable environment. The young Negro is trained to all this from his first baby cry ; it obtrudes itself upon his sense of smell by means of the rancid odour of the coating of camwood ointment which preserves him from the ills of early childhood ; upon his sense of sight by the grimaces which the dull eye of infancy sees his parents making ; upon his sense of taste by the ashes which are laid upon his tongue as a charm ; and upon his sense of hearing by the long nights during which sacred dances are going on. The first lessons to be impressed upon his memory, as he lies on his mat of an evening in the state of credulity peculiar to one's first sleep, are the stories which experienced and trustworthy persons tell of ghosts, of mysterious, dark, and dire events and the interpositions of supernatural beings in mundane affairs. Thus he acquires a habit of conforming his actions to this mould as it slowly takes shape and polish, and, since the actions of all his companions are cast in the same mould too, their mechanical harmony in all the events of their private or public life no longer surprises us.

This mental fusion and convergence of actions is greatly helped on by various exercises in which the whole community shares. When a group of individuals is compelled to repeat the same sentences simultaneously or to go through the same motions and keep time to them, these words and motions may be of any nature whatsoever, and quite indifferent to the object sought, but gradually the concepts and the mentality of each participant cease to be personal and independent, and become subservient to the ideas and mentality of the group. The use of such means for producing enthusiasm in a crowd is hackneyed, and indeed they have all been vaunted by the great leaders of men ; for prayers and songs make for harmony in faith among



religious people just as rhythmical motions and drill are the best means of transforming a company of soldiers into a homogeneous body devoted to its chief. And just as a sound draws its proper harmonics from sonorous bodies which adjoin, while harmonics that are unsuitable to it remain silent, so do exercises, which are shared by all, subdue individual incongruities, that they may isolate, amplify, and enlarge similarities even to the innermost recesses of the subconscious self. This suppression of the individual in the mass creates prodigious strength, but destroys the stone for the sake of the building. Who, indeed, can tell whether a nation which is as rigid as a bar of steel, and capable of crushing all obstacles, but whose component parts are fettered by invisible powers, is better than a social body which is reduced to the condition of an ash-heap in which each minutest particle slips and rolls and is blown away by the whim of the lightest breeze? The former answers to the most ancient ideas of all nations, and the latter seems to resemble modern notions ; but both contain an unknown element which is beyond our ken, for it can be disclosed only by a knowledge, which we cannot attain, of mankind's final goal.

Now that we have considered this question under its most general and most majestic aspect, let us look at its humble application to certain characteristics in the social life of the African tribes. A modulated noise captivates a native crowd, and their consciousness vanishes, their personality is lulled asleep, and a uniform state of credulity is induced in them by monotonous prosody and melodics, by refrains repeated over and over again, by cadenced motions, and by phrases and gestures which constantly recur in regular revolutions, or, in one word, by every influence which is mechanical and characterized by periodicity. This sort of enthusiasm is quite involuntary, for the imitation of a gesture which is repeated again and again, a nod of the head when one hears a piece of rhythmical music

or the contagious influence of convulsive movements force themselves upon the attention and stultify the will. Spiritualists know very well that they can put their audiences in a proper frame of mind by requesting them to sing any kind of songs, or even by having a piano played in the wings.<sup>1</sup> According to the case, genuine intoxication, forgetfulness of one's personality, ecstasy, or that spiritual and imaginative excitement which has always attracted the men of every age and clime, may result from these practices.

Primitive men in particular are very fond of such sensations, and it needs only their monotonous music, with its constant repetitions, the continuous beating of drums, and the tireless reiteration of a song which swells and dies away and begins again for whole nights together, to put their weak brains quickly into the state which I have just been describing. If to this we add active participation in the form of the dance, and, if necessary, heady drinks and intoxicating philtres, forgetfulness of the ego may reach a state of madness.

Love, war, and religion have all been thought to be the origin of the dance, but in reality they are mere incidentals ; for its real object is intoxication. Primitive men have long noticed the unusual nature of this semi-madness, to which they ascribe a sort of sacred character, because they understand that it inspires actions in which consciousness has no share. In the transport which dominates and clasps them irresistibly they see a supernatural influence ; for the dance is to them less a pleasure than an incitement to murder, love, or the raising of spirits. The Black Man's Terpsichore has characteristics of Mars, Venus, and Hecate ; she arranges love's golden hour, plays the martial music which makes men bold, and last of all she is the priestess of enchantments and mightiest incantations, who pronounces the death sentence on prisoners of war and

<sup>1</sup> It is known that Mesmer helped to propagate crises among his patients by means of an orchestra hidden in an adjacent room.

delivers over to public vengeance the vampire whose spells have caused the latest death in the community.

None but men are admitted to the sacred dances, and they proceed to them alone and in meditation ; but gradually a mystic delirium seizes them, *Deus, ecce deus!*—a dæmon takes possession of them, they cease to be men, and already have a foot in the hereafter, where they see the mysterious causes of their own lives and of all Nature. They become capable of the most appalling excitement and the most horrible scenes of ferocity. Woe to the poor devil whom the omens have caused to be suspected of witchcraft ! Forthwith he will be torn to bits or hacked in pieces by the maddened crowd ; his vitals will be snatched out of his body, and his bloody limbs will serve as cotillon favours in the final capers of this savage saraband.

We shall conclude this long chapter on religion by considering it from the social point of view. Once more the chief appears to us as the purely nominal representative of authority. The Nganga is the real leader of public opinion, for his very formidable and unquestioned ascendancy is guaranteed by his magic arts, and his sway is promoted by a caste of whom I am about to speak and of whom he is to a great extent the instructor.

## 2. *Initiations and the Governing Caste.*

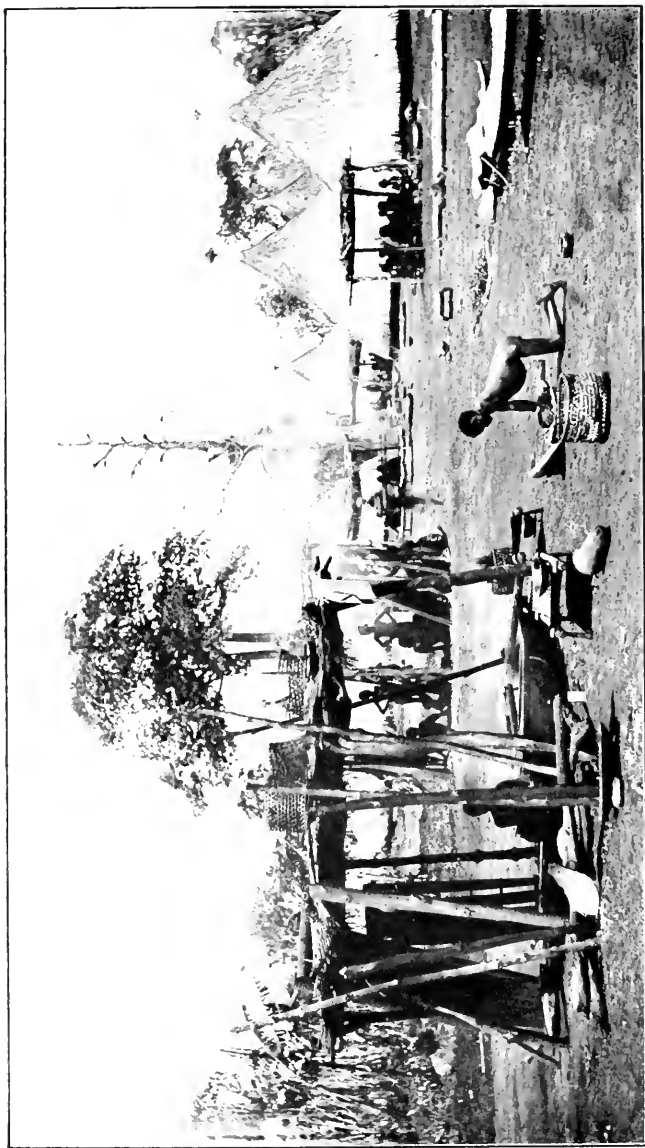
This is a subject which has taxed the sagacity of students of African matters, and which already has a very copious bibliography. When one desires to pursue M. de Jonghe's attempt,<sup>1</sup> and harmonize and synthesize the reports of the numerous observers and authors who have discussed the question, one faces

<sup>1</sup> "Les sociétés secrètes au Bas-Congo," in the *Revue des Questions scientifiques*, published by the Société scientifique of Brussels, October 20, 1907.

radical incompatibilities, and in consequence is utterly unable to draw a conclusion. Indeed, the most instructive feature of M. de Jonghe's interesting work seems to me this very incoherence of his data and the weakness of his conclusions.

We must not impugn the honesty and truthfulness of those who have observed these facts, for they have examined them carefully and have made accurate reports about them.

Are we then to believe that they have been deceived by their informants? Upon this point we must make a distinction; for in the great majority of cases they have not been knowingly deceived, but have been misled here, just as they have been in regard to many details concerning the psychology and customs of primitive man. The trouble lies in the way they have gone about the matter. I have often seen persons attempting to extract information from Negroes by plying them with a long series of questions, which, as I must confess, were judicious and in accordance with the strictest logical rules. But this is a deplorable fashion of studying mankind in nearly every case, and where the Negro is concerned it is almost inevitably misleading. Examination by means of an interrogatory is a method of investigation which is much more difficult than is generally supposed; for when one questions a man, there is great danger of coming to grief either by silencing him altogether, by impelling him to lie, or by helping him to an answer, even if one takes no account of the many factors arising out of the subject itself and containing possibilities of error, chief among which are the self-interest, suggestibility, and imagination of the person who is under examination. The best method is to watch, as though one were an unbiased spectator, with no preconceived theory whatsoever, and to let the individual act and speak freely without pressure or influence. Induce him to give you his confidence of his own accord, and



*Plate XVIII.*

THE HAREM OF A ZANDE SULTAN.



to forget that you are present ; and do not allow him to suspect that you are watching him. Act as though you were invisible, so that he may not be disconcerted and alter his usual bearing.

The last question is whether we are to impeach the interpretation given us by these authorities of the facts which they have observed, and to this I answer yes, for I believe that a great part of the incoherence in the subject under discussion is the result of undue impulsiveness in the interpretation of the facts, and to insufficient detachment from *a priori* theories and preconceived ideas. The first investigators who noticed that certain classes of individuals in Negro society appeared to be different from the common herd hastened to say "secret societies." Nothing misleads the mind like a word spoken at random, for it defines and prejudges the fact under discussion. The person who hears it accepts it involuntarily, for it represents a ready-made idea which is convenient for his mind. This is the origin of innumerable errors which still persist and which we all accept unthinkingly. Such errors are often very unfortunate, as I know full well, for a new fact can be described only by a name which is known, though we ought to be able to give it a neutral name until further orders.

To us the expression "secret societies" implies mystery, more or less terrible ordeals, and dark intrigues ; for we immediately think of the Holy Vehme, the Franc-juges, the dévorants, and the Camorra. Then we do our best, at any cost, to enclose the new facts in the compass with which we are familiar, because we do not know how, and strictly speaking we cannot detach ourselves from our own personality, our innate or acquired ideas, and the complex concepts which we possess as civilized men. We want the Negro to think like ourselves, we assume that he has our logical forms and processes of ratiocination, and we wish to find a rigid system of precepts, rules, statutes, and dogmas

in these "secret societies." Unless I have fallen into a similar error myself—or a contrary one, from being unduly suspicious—I think that the true state of affairs is much simpler, if we will but compel ourselves to look at the facts alone and to add nothing to them.

Our positive and indisputable information in regard to this problem is very slight. We know that at a fixed period of life, near the age of puberty, certain young people, sometimes the males only and sometimes females as well, are taken from their villages and secluded in a remote part of the bush for an indefinite time. It seems that these secluded persons are not all placed in the same class, but are divided into different colleges. We must take this peculiarity into account, but as we have no exact knowledge about it, we must collect our information without making any distinctions, and must consider it as a whole, leaving ourselves free to make deductions from it later, if we can. What is important and indubitable is that the seclusion almost always begins by a sham representation of death, in which the subject either feigns to sink down unconscious, or some stupefying, intoxicating, or hallucinating drug is administered to him. We have little information as to what occurs during the period of seclusion; we do not know whether the life includes sacred dances, orgies, dissolute scenes, or instruction, or whether the initiates simply lead the ordinary village existence. All this may occur in succession, as a matter of fact, but very probably there is no fixed rule nor anything like a definite programme. Only it appears that the common people must be prevented from finding out these mysterious secrets, and that all means, including murder, may be employed to this end. The adepts are finally supposed to be resurrected, and then they return to the village; but they carry the idea of resurrection to such an extent that they no longer recognize their former companions or their brothers, fathers, or mothers. Last of all, we must note the use between



adepts of a conventional form of speech, which is very rudimentary, and appears to be either an archaic dialect or a rude imitation of the common language.

Now all the above facts are a jumble of very dissimilar elements, but they all have one point of contact in the idea of a change of condition, and of a chrysalid transformation which occurs at certain striking periods of life. I have previously spoken of the metamorphoses which signalize the transition from childhood to adult age and which mark recovery from a serious illness. The subject is supposed to be so completely changed into another man that he loses his name and takes a new one ; and there may be still other cases that we do not know, which occasion a change of personality. This mysterious institution, which I have described as far as it is accessible to our knowledge and which appears to us like a homogeneous whole, is really a blend of many customs and ceremonies, among which the one that I am about to speak of is undoubtedly the most important from the social point of view.

This metamorphosis offers the male citizen an additional opportunity of transforming himself, of emerging from the crowded ranks of the servile herd, and of taking his place in the governing class. Whether one wishes it or not, the formation of a governing class or aristocracy in any society is a necessary phenomenon. The political *voûs*, in the sense in which Plato conceived it, is the organ of society *par excellence*, just as the brain is that of a living being. This political aristocracy changes according to different periods, and in spite of its etymology does not necessarily represent what is best in the nation, but reflects alternate states of health or disease in the mass from which it has sprung. The history of revolutions is made up of the vicissitudes in the reciprocal adaptation of the governing caste and the masses. We have examined the interplay of action and reaction which maintains the asso-

ciation between an authority and its subjects, and therefore we know that the governing caste can hold its own only when it makes itself acceptable to the common people either by gratifying their passions or winning their respect.

The former is always dangerous, because it means bidding higher and higher for popularity, and going bankrupt in the end.

A man may gain the respect of the populace either by force, by being personally esteemed, or by the reputation of holiness. Force, however, is delegated by the majority, which may grant it or turn it against its agents, as it pleases. Personal esteem rests on a surer foundation ; but Negroes are not men whose goodness is so great that their privileges will not make them forget their heavy duties, that their wealth will preserve them from the temptation of betraying their trust, that their morality will guarantee their just dealings, and that their intelligence will be fortified by prudence and experience ; for as a race they do not understand power save as it subserves their selfish and private interests. It is at their rulers' reputation for holiness that primitive men have always paused, while waiting until future ages should educate their consciences, as has not yet occurred among either the Negroes or ourselves. But that this sacred character may influence the multitude, the one who assumes it must be invested with a halo of religious ceremony, must impress the credulous common people, dazzle their imagination, and show them that the governing caste consists of superior beings verging upon the superhuman. It is true that these beings come from the same surroundings as the populace itself ; but they must be thought of as dead to their original condition and re-born to a higher one. Once they crept about among the rabble of women, slaves, and common people, but they have sloughed this coarse garment, have been purified by a supposed death, and now at last they soar

aloft, assume a new name, forget their past life, and dwell with the suzerain caste. This is the essential point about this institution, which again, from the ritual point of view, is simply a particular application of the general notion of metamorphosis.

The ceremonies, dances, and antics of all sorts, which surround the imaginary death, seclusion, and resurrection, are mere childishness stripped of dogma and ritual, whose details present infinite varieties and are uninteresting in connection with this investigation.

It will be more attractive for us to try and gain some idea of the sentiments which actuate the different persons who take part in the comedy ; and from what I have already said of religion in general and of the Nganga in particular it will be easier to grasp what remains to be said about the adept.

Is the adept conscious of participating in an impudent piece of fraud? Does real faith enter into the matter? If so, how comes it that he is not undeceived by the palpable falseness of the mysteries with which he is supposed to be connected? It is certain that the ceremonial has the special object of satisfying the Negro's liking for witchcraft, magic rites, and the solemnity of mystical motions ; but we must disregard outward appearances and get to the bottom of the matter. We must not be deceived into thinking that primitive man, with his simple faith, judges these things as we do with our blasé twentieth-century scepticism. He is not at all loath to admit the existence of invisible and extra-human beings, though the symbol under which they are represented is the coarsest and most obvious possible ; and accordingly, as the neophyte passes through the successive stages of his metamorphosis, it is quite natural for him to believe that the symbolic actions to which he devotes himself mask a secret mystery, and even to persuade himself that he has really become another man—no doubt in the person of his double. The drugs which

are administered to him, the respect with which the credulous crowd surrounds him, the intoxication of the sacred dance, the always-imminent threat of poison in case blasphemy or treachery should be proved against him, and last of all the marked social advantages which his new position procures for him, all tend to strengthen this belief of his, which to us appears the height of absurdity.

Accordingly I end this paragraph on the so-called Negro secret societies by defining them as aristocratic castes which are founded upon religion and whose object is government. There is no doubt that these castes are based upon an unacknowledged design of exploiting human credulity; but we must judge the matter from the most liberal point of view. This first attempt at aristocracy effects a noticeable amount of progress in so far as an aristocracy is the embodiment of a nation's highest intellectual qualities, at every period of history, and acts for good or evil according to the observer's point of view.

### 3. *Justice and its Administration.*

The institution and administration of justice among the Negroes of Equatorial Africa are directly connected with these peoples' religious doctrines, of which they are simply the result and rational application, while our discussion of disease has shown us their starting-point.

The groundwork of justice and the theory of Negro criminal law are quite arbitrary, and it would be useless to search for any moral origin in them save a trite notion of good and evil, which, as I have said, cannot yet be detached from selfish subjectivity and separated from purely human contingencies. We have seen that an undiscovered offence is none at all in the Negro's opinion, and this naturally excludes any idea of conscience, so that the double object of the law is to

exact revenge and furnish an example. Its jurisdiction is limited to one village, though it sometimes extends to a friendly neighbouring hamlet in which the first village has a preponderant interest ; but beyond this it never goes.

Negro justice is blind and deaf. Its procedures are capricious and arbitrary, and its decisions are mainly inspired by such fortuitous circumstances as were dear to Bridoye. A legal examination consists of tittle-tattle, palavers, and secret plotting, of which the prisoner often knows nothing. An accused person has no protection, nor any right of petition or appeal. Nor is punishment proportioned to crime ; for the only efficacious penalty is death, since imprisonment is out of the question, because police are lacking and jails cannot be built in the present rudimentary state of native architecture ; while payment of fines is easily evaded because no means of compulsion exist.

It is easy to draw up a list of all the misdemeanours and crimes which are amenable to the law. In the first place we must remember that women, children, and slaves are not persons, but property, and accordingly adultery, rape, corruption of minors, and enticing of servants are to be classed as attacks upon property. Blows and wounds, accidental homicide, and voluntary homicide which is brought about by natural or occult means constitute assaults on persons. The occult means employed in committing homicide are sorcery, witchcraft, and in general all such magical practices as occasion either a sudden and unexplained death or allow decease to supervene slowly by means of internal, chronic, and insidious lesions. Simple souls among the Negroes are extremely sensitive to insults, which are most serious when directed against a man's forbears ; and it is a sight worth seeing to watch the anger of a Native who has just heard his mother's name dragged through the mire. "He has insulted my father and my mother !" he will cry. Yet it is considered that

an interchange of boisterous abuse is a perfectly proper way of indulging one's feelings. Neither insulting remarks nor slander are actionable, and rarely result in violence.

Upon the whole Negro criminal law appears to concern itself with human beings only. I do not say with "persons," because the Native conception of human personality is different from ours. The communism in which these tribes live and the economic bases of their civilization cause attacks upon non-human property to occupy a very secondary rank in criminal procedure. Every human being, on the contrary, is either a free man or woman, or a slave man or woman, or lastly, a child of one or other of these classes, and as the village is nothing but an enlarged family, all its members in a way mutually possess or are possessed, either naturally or artificially, and this presupposes them to be more or less personally interested in putting down crimes and misdemeanours which are committed in the heart of the community. This is the reason why they have never been led to create a special judiciary establishment under the auspices of the entire social body. The functions of examining magistrate, public prosecutor, court of justice, barrister and jury, are assumed by everybody, by the populace, by public opinion. In theory any one may investigate damage that he has sustained and is free to take the law into his own hands ; but matters generally run a less simple course.

When a man seeks satisfaction for some injury he shows unimaginable stupidity. His first concern is to scream and wail and to rouse the village by rushing like a madman from one end of it to the other. If one asks him what has happened he bursts into lamentations, with which he mingles the grossest absurdities and the most inadmissible accusations, and to which he gives a finishing touch of confusion by expressing his indignation over and over again in the most exaggerated terms. The whole village turns out to inquire what the great

row is about, for small-talk has an absorbing fascination in all countries, and the spectacle of human misery and pain is a savoury morsel. The neighbours make haste to take a hand, because they are curious or wish to dawdle about, or perhaps have that very human desire of taking sides which we see exhibited every day in our great cities when some fool interferes between two strangers who are fighting and gets all the blows himself. The crowds argue, chatter, harangue, and jabber in eager rivalry in the midst of the uproar and disorder, while the injured party bawls with might and main amid the general hubbub. Finally the men assemble in the guardhouse, the women are turned out, and there is a little more calmness in the discussion, but never any more system. The assembly forms its conclusion as luck will have it; it may be right by some good fortune, or it may be wrong if chance wills it so. It is impossible to imagine how difficult it is to shed any light upon affairs that have to do with Native law. As for witnesses, every one knows how little they are worth.<sup>1</sup>

Every witness bursts into a flood of silly, nonsensical, self-evidently lying words, certifies to things that have happened out of his presence, and denies what he has seen and heard. He looks at the audience to observe what their feelings are, and modifies his evidence according to the impression which he sees that he is making. If he is called back and questioned again everything is changed, and dates, places, and persons no longer agree. Nay, more, the victim himself often exculpates one who is really guilty, while sometimes overwhelming evidence accuses an innocent man simply because he is not generally popular, and accused persons have also been known to acknowledge their guilt in regard to actions which they have never committed. There is no shedding any light upon the subject amid such foolishness, where confession and evidence are equally valueless.

<sup>1</sup> See Book II, chapter v.

As a last shift, resort is had to the ordeal, that ancient form of trial which is peculiar to barbarous races, and which is the most appropriate and rational method of discovering and convicting individuals who are guilty of sorcery, vampirism, and witchcraft, for it is like setting a thief to catch a thief, in regard to the occult. Needless to say, very few people can be induced to confess themselves guilty of such crimes, and, indeed, the guilty man is generally the first to know nothing about the matter.

At this point the Nganga steps in as an expert in ordeals. He is consulted as to the nature of the case and its seriousness, and in his rôle of grand inquisitor then decides what sort of investigation the suspected person shall undergo. Many considerations enter into such an important decision as this, for the expert must not be a Nganga alone, but a diplomat too, and must not neglect any small profits belonging to the profession. To an enormous proportion the result of the inquiry obviously depends upon the Nganga. Sometimes the suspected person is designated by public opinion ; sometimes the voice of the people hesitates, and then it becomes the inquisitor's duty to endeavour to find the guilty man among the populace. He must take account simultaneously of the popular feeling, the magnificence of the fees which have been paid or promised him, the position and reputation of the persons involved, his own likes or dislikes, and lastly of the political factors, among which his private interest holds the first place. Every one in the village trembles, for no one can guarantee that his double may not have slipped out some night, to indulge in fantastic nocturnal revels and commit dark crimes which even the body knew nothing about.

There are a good many kinds of Negro ordeals, some of which are as whimsical as they are harmless, and are evidently reserved for congenial persons whom the Nganga is anxious to exculpate before everybody.



Such is the mild ordeal which consists in jumping over a fetish, at the risk of falling dead in case one has told a lie, and which, as far as I am aware, has never unmasked an impostor.

Most widespread of all is the poison ordeal, for which the Ngangas use the bark of certain trees that are not positively known, and that may also perhaps vary according to the inquisitor's caprice.<sup>1</sup> The Nganga prepares an infusion of this bark and the prisoner apprehensively swallows the potion which contains his acquittal or death-sentence, as the case may be. If he vomits it, he is considered innocent, while if it has no effect on him, or if he dies of it, his guilt is proved. There is no pity for the werewolf or vampire who has caused his neighbour's death by spells and witchcraft, and if he has not succumbed to the poison already, he is condemned to be put to death, often in the cruellest manner ; for he is either torn to pieces on the spot by a crowd drunk with dancing and palm-wine, or is tied up and drowned, or sometimes is buried alive.

More indulgence is shown when the murder has been committed by force of arms ; for an indemnity is all that is asked in such a case. The discussions are lengthy, as may well be imagined ; but when the family receives the "price of blood" or the "man-price" agreed upon, they announce that their claim is satisfied. Such complaisance is not surprising, for the relatives secure a windfall which they had not counted upon, and consider that it was a good idea for the deceased to let himself be killed.

We have seen that theft, adultery, and the premature death of a wife are liable to indemnity in favour of the injured party, and I have also mentioned how difficult

<sup>1</sup> Some authors especially designate the *Erythrophloeum Guineense*. But according to my own experience and in agreement with Mr. Bentley, I believe that there is no fixed rule in the matter, and that everything depends upon the Nganga's favour.

it is to collect damages, and what palavers, hatreds, and even wars may result from an attempt to do so.

When a man who is fined is insolvent, he is sometimes obliged to sell himself. If the case concerns a slave, the matter becomes more complicated, because his master is punished more than he by any penalty imposed upon him ; however, all such cases are liable to action at law. I am persuaded that any Negro would fear to change his social status and its many complications for a simple form of legislation, lest he should lose some of his precious opportunities for silly chattering.

After what I have previously said of the moral, religious, and political concepts of the tribes of Equatorial Africa, there is not much left for the chapter on justice to enlarge upon. This ends the description of the Negro village, considered as the first organized embryo of primitive civilization, and it renews our impression that, in regard to crimes and their punishment, as in regard to many other points, Negro society is the modern witness to the history of all nations. We may ask how these primitive men, who have been for long centuries secluded from the rest of the world, happen to manifest, in their manners and beliefs, the most characteristic features of people who are entirely unlike them in race, and who tend to diverge from them, if I may say so, by virtue of their intellectual qualities, their moral character, and their area of distribution. Was there, from the beginning, at the bottom of the dark minds of the first men, a primordial germ, or if one prefers, a guiding plan, which generated and directed the broad lines of the concepts of all mankind in races of every colour? Or, if the races which developed apart from the others borrowed these concepts ages ago from other nations, why have they changed in nothing but form after so many centuries, and why has their essential foundation remained almost intact?

### PART THIRD

## *SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS SUPERIOR TO THE VILLAGE*

I LOOK upon the village as the culminating point of this investigation, because it is the essential element of African society, or, if one prefers to say so, it is the whole of this society. I could accordingly consider my task as ended by the last lines which I have written ; for, although the subsequent complexities of village life are apparently important, they are only on the surface, and do not admit of any fundamental modification in the administration, politics, and institutions of the African tribes. It only remains for me to tell in a few words how the principles which preside over the birth, organization, and activities of the village adapt themselves to more extensive organisms merely as a result of continuity. We shall now begin again at the beginning and rapidly survey the various stages of complexity in village life, until we reach the highest pinnacle which they attain in Equatorial Africa. In the course of the preceding chapters, I have, in any case, been induced to exceed the limits of the plan which I had adopted, and this fact will make it easier to explain the little that remains to be said.

*Villages of the First Class.*—Here again we have the original domestic nucleus of the social cell, consisting of the father and his wives and natural children.

*Villages of the Second Class.*—The family is now enlarged by artificial children, slaves, and clients, with their wives and followers, and the group as thus constituted forms a complete and comparatively homogeneous entity, which I shall call the *simple village*.

*Villages of the Third Class.*—The thoroughly selfish motives which induce individuals to unite in simple villages also lead to the establishments of the Third Class. Several simple villages feel the need of drawing closer to one another, either because the artificial members who have been incorporated in them have not given them strength enough against the dangers or difficulties which surround them, or because their district affords only a few limited sites which are fit for man's habitation, or lastly, because certain localities are endowed with some such unusual advantage as a spring, the confluence of two rivers, the meeting-place of several basins, or a convergence of natural trade-routes. Their similar interests may thus lead several simple villages to take up adjoining positions, and the result is sometimes a complete fusion, such as we see in the Upper Ubangi. More frequently, however, as is the case among the Bantus, the villages adjoin, but do not mingle, and we have a cluster of simple villages built side by side in either the linear or dispersed order. In spite of their proximity each village remains independent, with its distinct organization and its separate chief, and indeed there are some whose severance of interests amounts to open enmity.

*Villages of the Fourth Class.*—The close associations of village life naturally exert reciprocal influences. You must come to terms with the neighbour whom you elbow every hour in the day as you walk along the common path, and no matter whether you are exasperated at his bearing, tastes, and habits, or whether you sympathize with them, something of his life does thrust

itself upon you. The habit of frequenting the same places and the pursuit of similar occupations lead to necessary adjustments and compromises ; for there cannot be perfect equality of action and reaction at every point of contact, and so it always happens that one of the groups tends to predominate over the rest. The chief of this group is at once the initiator and the beneficiary of this preponderance ; he is the richest member of the community and has the gift of palaver ; his counsels are wise and ingenious, and he is a stirring intriguer who is lavish of magnificent promises. So far, however, his position is still the result of influence alone, for there is no change in the internal organization of the clustered villages. Nevertheless one is conscious of the fact that some notion is springing up of mutual responsibilities which are extending beyond the family tie and becoming more broadly human.

*Villages of the Fifth Class.*—The next step shows us the first attempt at subordination in the governing body ; for here we have a multiple village, in which there are two ranks placed one above the other. The incumbents of the lower grade we may call “ district chiefs ” and those of the higher “ mayors.”

*Villages of the Sixth Class.*—For the physical conditions which made a certain number of simple villages pack themselves into densely populated centres we must now substitute a broader and more hospitable environment ; we must imagine a peaceful population, plains or hillocks which contain many habitable sites, and a soil which is uniformly fertile or barren throughout its whole extent. The people are no longer obliged to crowd together in restricted areas, but are quite at liberty to spread out. The theory of mutual protection still exists, but under another form, for an economic alliance and an association for mutual benefit now become the predominant motives. The union is no

longer a physical fact, but a virtual union, a political alliance, a business association between partners who live at a distance ; and no longer does it demand that the population shall be crowded into a small space, as is necessary when there is always a dread lest some enemy surprise one, or when a market for one's trade or a fishing district must be watched. The barrenness of the soil and the scarcity of provisions often make it impossible to accumulate too many mouths in one district. This artificial group is formed in the same manner as the compact groups of the Third and Fourth Classes, save that the simple villages of which it is made up are miles away from one another, though they still recognize the supremacy of one of them over the rest. Of course it is only by a figure of speech and in order to emphasize this continuity of development better that I still call this scattered social organism a village. The gradation of rank in the governing body, which was barely visible in the next class below, is more plainly indicated here. Each simple village preserves its own separate chief ; but the whole confederation recognizes the authority of a chief of chiefs or prince. I think I may spare the reader the native names of these steps in the hierarchy, for they would not be interesting, and moreover different tribes and dialects use different names. This organization by no means implies that a fixed territory is conferred upon the prince, for the soil remains neutral, and indeed villages belonging to different confederations may be found sharing it, or at least parts of it.

*Villages of the Seventh Class.*—There is no reason why villages belonging to the principality should retain their primitive simplicity, for they may be constituted in the same way as villages of the Third Class. Some of them become multiple villages because they enjoy a favourable position or have large economic interests, and a third rank is then added to the hierarchy, so

that we may speak of "chiefs of quarters" and a "mayor" in each multiple village, and of a "prince" who is at the head of the confederation.

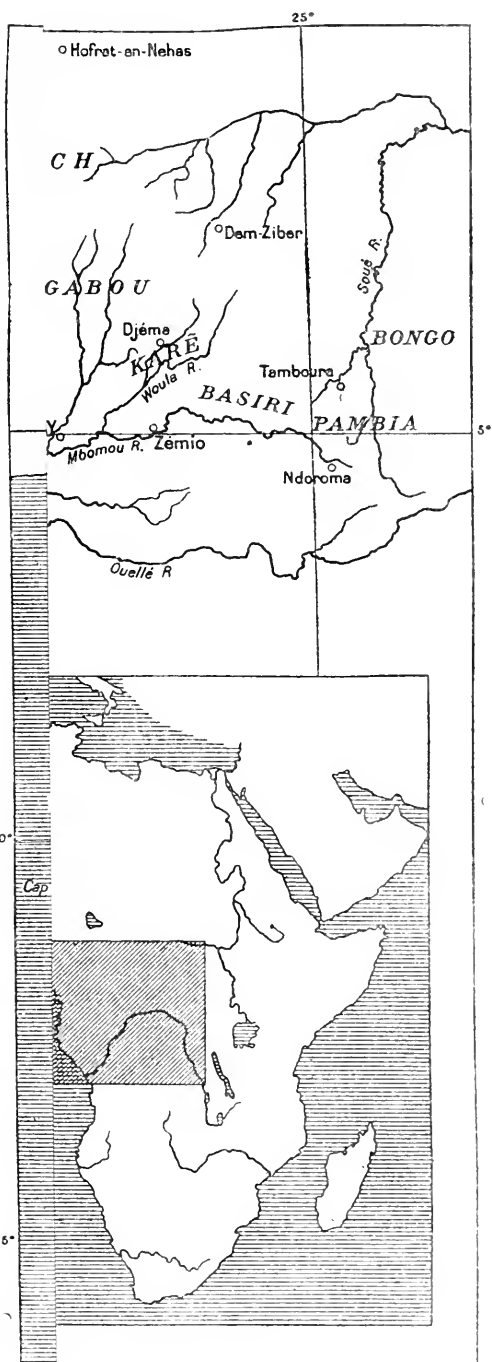
*Villages of the Eighth Class.*—Lastly, several of these principalities unite and take a supreme chief—thus approaching the organized State. Henceforth there are four grades in the hierarchy: the "chief of the quarter," the "mayor" or chief of the multiple village, the "prince," and the "king."<sup>1</sup> Owing to his high position the supreme chief is invested with a sort of sacred character which is indicated by peculiar respect and by tabus. In order that confusion between the different authorities may be avoided and especially that the vanity and prerogatives of each may be treated with due deference, the subordination of each rank to the one above it must be ratified by means of special insignia, and by forms of ceremonial and etiquette which become more and more stately as the higher ranks are reached. Last of all a new institution makes its appearance in the form of a tax or tribute which is irregularly paid to the king by the people. What I said in my discussion of native wealth and its tokens will make the reader realize at once that this tax is not at all a contribution to the public budget. Our knowledge of the economic and financial ideas of the African races and of the way in which work is organized among them shows that the gift of a few bales of cloth and loads of brass wire to the king is of no value for defence against an enemy, for the construction of public works, and for the development of commerce; but in any case these matters are too vast for such small minds, and no one cares anything about them. The payment of tribute is simply an act of homage rendered by subjects to their supreme chief, a sort of Civil List which permits the latter to keep up his position with

<sup>1</sup> This is the king who is called the Mokoko among the Atyo or the Bateke of the Congo.

dignity and to lord it over the rest of the nation by means of his wealth, which is the first attribute of power.

These appearances of organization must not, however, deceive one, since the Mokoko's kingdom is simply a big village, over which the sovereign has no more real authority than the humblest of his chiefs, for although he, like the rest, is the product of a vague form of universal suffrage, he has no police force, nor any power of carrying out such sentences as he may pronounce. He is merely a symbol, and represents authority in the same way as an idol is the image of a god. The social mechanism continues to operate in virtue of the mysterious force generated by the subliminal motive powers which lie deep down in the souls of the common people. Its march is like that of a glacier, in which the surface inequalities, cracks, and general disarray are but imperceptible accidents as compared with the irresistible and majestic progress which causes it to flow on deliberately like a river as hard as rock, as yielding as a wave, and as long-suffering as eternity. The glacier follows a course which is mapped out for it by the snows that are stored upon the mountain heights, by gravitation, by the downward inclination of the slopes over which it passes, and by the contour of the valleys in its path; but what genius is ever to conceive of the unapproachable laws which govern the century-long advance of human civilization?





**EQUATORIAL AFRICA**

Scale 1 10,000,000

15° 20° 25°

Libreville, Bangui, Leopoldville, and other cities are marked. Major rivers like the Congo, Zaire, and others are shown. The map is divided into several regions, including the Congo Basin, the Zaire Basin, and the Bahr River Basin. The title 'EQUATORIAL AFRICA' is prominently displayed at the top left. An inset map in the bottom right corner shows the location of the main map area within the continent of Africa, with a scale of 1:10,000,000.

Scale 1 10,000,000

Scale: 1 = 100,000,000

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